Foreword

According to the ‘Great Man’ theory, leaders are born, not made. Some people have certain innate traits or qualities that make them leadership material. In his book, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Historic in History*, Thomas Carlyle describes how Napoleon was born to change the face of human history. Carlyle says we have to search for the ‘ablest’ man to be our leader and then submit to him for our own good. Leo Tolstoy disagreed with Carlyle. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy writes, ‘It is incomprehensible that millions of Christian men killed and tortured each other because Napoleon was ambitious...’ Tolstoy tells us that great men are nothing more than labels that give names to events. In other words, leaders are the right people, in the right place, at the right time. Fortunately, we do not have to choose between Carlyle’s and Tolstoy’s positions because both are right – leaders make history and history makes leaders. The study of leadership inevitably requires an understanding of that place where individuals interact with history and culture.

In this book, Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, Stanislav Shekshnia, Konstantin Korotov and Elizabeth Florent-Treacy present an eloquent account of the new Russian entrepreneurs and the cultural and historical context in which they operate. Rarely do books on leadership provide both a rich description of cultural values and nuances *and* a grounded analysis of leaders’ personalities and styles of leadership. Rarely do they offer such fascinating first-hand accounts from leaders who sound more as if they have stepped out of novels than the ashes of communism. Academics and business people will find this book an invaluable resource for understanding Russian attitudes towards business and leadership.

This book focuses on Russian entrepreneurs, but it offers lessons that apply to other cultures and other leadership contexts. The case studies in the book describe the psychological make-up of leaders, their family backgrounds, and their personalities. They illustrate some of the striking similarities of leaders across cultures. The book also describes the challenges of creating businesses in a culture that lacks the values associated with business in a free market, such as enlightened self-interest, adherence to rule of law, and a work ethic that includes the belief that hard work will pay off.

Changing ingrained cultural beliefs about work, leadership and business is not only a challenge for post-communist leaders but also business leaders in

other societies and organizations. As the authors point out, the most important lessons in this book come from the ways in which these new Russian business leaders bring about radical change in their organizations and employees. For example, how do they build a productive workforce out of people raised in a ‘we pretend to work, they pretend to pay us’ culture? How do they provide quality service in a society where customer service is best summed up in the Russian novel *The Twelve Chairs*, by a sign in an office that reads, ‘Finish Your Business and Leave’?

The New Russian Business Leaders is an exciting addition to the New Horizons in Leadership Studies Series. The series consists of scholarly interdisciplinary studies that enhance our understanding of leadership and the values and people that shape its practice. Cultural studies of leadership such as this one help us discover which aspects of leadership are universal and which ones are local.

Joanne B. Ciulla
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