

Wendy Born

**Raising Leaders: Using the
principles of parenting at work
to become a great leader and
create great leaders**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

What's in it for me? A modern guide to parenting and leadership.

Children split their time between the playroom and the classroom; employees chat in the breakroom and present in the boardroom. These locations may seem very different. But smart leaders know that a few simple strategies are effective with both parenting and work.

These blinks show how parents and managers today actually need many of the same skills to succeed. Drawing on Wendy Born's own family life and 25 years of experience coaching leaders in the corporate world, this friendly guide offers practical advice on nurturing essential leadership skills for any environment. Filled with both stories and actionable insights, the wisdom in these blinks will help you navigate problems at home and in the office.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how an office is like a classroom;
- why judo belongs in school; and
- what makes Queen Elizabeth such a stellar leader.

Parenting and management share many of the same stresses.

It happens the same way every night. After a long, exhausting day, you crawl into bed to get some much-needed rest. As soon as you close your eyes, you're out like a light. But it doesn't last. Within an hour you hear your child crying in the next room. It's time to get up and do some more parenting.

New parents find themselves in this situation all the time, and leadership expert Wendy Born was no different. After having her first child, she struggled to keep up with the challenges of raising a young one. She often felt lost, isolated, and overwhelmed.

The feeling was uncomfortable, but not completely new. After all, many novice managers feel the same way in the workplace.

The key message here is: Parenting and management share many of the same stresses.

Raising a child, especially in its early years, is no easy task. Children can be difficult, unpredictable, and temperamental. And any workplace manager knows that colleagues can share many of these traits. The only real difference is that parenting is more than a full-time job – once you clock in, you can never clock out. Given these twin pressures, it's no wonder that so many people feel stressed out. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, nearly one in eight people regularly experience high levels of psychological distress.

However, both family life and the professional realm can also be fulfilling and rewarding. It's just a matter of approaching them in the right way – that is, with lots of empathy and compassion. When the Harvard Business Review

studied management styles at 84 companies, it found that CEOs with high levels of compassion outperformed their less kind peers by nearly 500 percent.

Cultivating compassion requires three forms of sight: insight, plain sight, and foresight. Insight is the ability to understand what you're doing and why you're doing it. Plain sight is the capacity to determine what actions and conditions are actually under your control. And foresight is the wisdom of knowing your long-term goals and the true purpose of your work.

You can begin nurturing these qualities by making the time for regular moments of quiet reflection. Try carving out 15 minutes a day to calmly consider your actions, your goals, and how you can align the two. You may find this practice will help you stay centered at work and at home. In the next blink, we'll look at

some more similarities between these two areas of life.

*“Leadership, like parenting, is
lonely, hard and often thankless.”*

Parents and leaders succeed by tending to five core leadership areas.

For Queen Elizabeth II, 2019 was a rough year. First, her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, caused an avoidable car accident. Next, her granddaughter was caught up in an embarrassing bribery scandal. Then, to top it all off, her son Prince Andrew went public about his relationship with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein.

Still, she navigated it all with grace and poise. Over her long career in the public eye, the queen has mastered the leadership skills necessary to excel in her dual role as matriarch of a family and monarch of a country. As her example shows, there are many similarities between good leadership and good parenting. Both positions require a balanced mix of boldness and benevolence.

The key message here is: Parents and leaders succeed by tending to five core leadership areas.

So, given that parenting and leadership share many of the same challenges and often require many of the same skills, how can you learn to succeed in either role? There's no exact formula, but both great parents and great leaders tend to shine in five basic areas.

The first of these core areas is *love*. Parents and leaders should approach those around them with warmth, compassion, and empathy. They should be willing to make sacrifices for the people they're responsible for, and be quick to nurture and forgive those in need.

The next area is *environment*. Children and employees both thrive in an environment that encourages free expression and gives clear expectations about accountability. Leaders and

parents should strive to create spaces where people feel empowered to try new things but also understand what success looks like.

The third core area is *health*. Both in the workplace and at home, people need to be physically and mentally healthy.

Parents should ensure that their children receive adequate nutrition and exercise, while employers should make sure that their workers can achieve a healthy work-life balance.

The fourth leadership area is *language*.

Every parent knows that children are likely to repeat and internalize the words they hear – and employees are no different. So, in both cases, the people at the top should carefully consider how they speak. Words of encouragement can go a long way in creating a nurturing environment.

And finally, the fifth core area is *vision*. Both families and workplaces flourish

when everyone can share goals, dreams, and ideas about the future.

So, how can leaders and parents put these core competencies into practice? Let's look at each area in depth over the next few blinks.

People do their best when given unwavering love and support.

Meet Gerald. At six years old, this young boy is smart, energetic, and adventurous. Unfortunately, he's also aggressive, short-tempered, and prone to throw tantrums.

From the very start, Gerald's temperament caused problems. Within weeks of starting school, he was expelled for threatening a teacher with scissors. By the end of the year, similar behavior got him banned from two more classrooms. At home, things weren't much better – he'd break toys and bruise people during violent outbursts.

Yet his parents didn't give up. Even as Gerald caused chaos wherever he went, they met his rage with calm, measured support and gentle guidance. Eventually, his behavior improved. It seems like a little love can go a long way.

The key message here is: People do their best when given unwavering love and support.

As Gerald's story shows, good parents deeply love their children, no matter what. That steady and unconditional love is essential for raising young ones, even through difficult times. When it comes to professional leadership, a similar dose of love can keep an organization running smoothly in good times and in bad. So, what does love look like in the professional realm?

Well, according to the Greeks, there are many types of love. There's *eros*, or erotic love; *ludus*, which is playful love; and *mania*, which is the type of romantic love that drives people wild. These aren't so appropriate in the workplace. But another type of love is: *pragma*. This type of love stems from mutual respect, deep connection, and trust – exactly the

qualities a good leader should demonstrate.

Leaders can cultivate this love by taking the time to understand their employees' needs and concerns, and giving feedback in the form of appreciation and counsel. Just how important is this type of connection? Well, in 2012, the insurance giant Towers Watson surveyed 32,000 employees across three dozen countries. They found that the single most important influence on workers' performance was whether or not they felt valued and appreciated by their supervisor.

Born can personally attest to this. Her colleague David once made a crucial paperwork error that cost his company \$90,000. Rather than berate and shame the man, David's boss calmly talked to him about what went wrong and how to avoid the mistake in the future. As a result of this act of love, David perfected

his workflow and ended up netting the company millions more in the future. Now, that's a sound investment.

Open and open-minded environments help everyone reach their potential.

Let's take a quick tour of a building where everyone is happy to spend their weekdays. Here, there are open, airy rooms filled with light and color. Posters on the walls espouse values of caring, respect, and persistence. And, all around, people are passionately working on creative projects.

No, this isn't a flashy coworking space. This is Parkhill Primary School. The administration here has assembled an ideal setting for young minds to learn. But the success of this school relies on more than just the decor. The teachers have also created an atmosphere where every student feels valued and motivated.

Modern workplaces should take a cue from this example. You see, when it comes to leading people toward success,

it's all about creating the right environment.

The key message here is: Open and open-minded environments help everyone reach their potential.

Even the best worker will fail if she's forced to toil under subpar conditions. Likewise, a struggling employee can achieve more if given the right support. Good leaders will create a working environment that is conducive to everyone's productivity. This is accomplished by creating an open, nonjudgmental atmosphere and giving clear, consistent messages about success and accountability.

So, what exactly makes for an ideal work environment? Well, for one, the best workplaces are safe spaces for the open exchange of ideas. Studies conducted at North Carolina University show that people perform best and achieve more when they feel psychologically safe – that

is, when they feel empowered to express thoughts and feelings without fear of ridicule or reprisal.

Effective leaders, like good teachers, can cultivate this open atmosphere through example. They can demonstrate their commitment to openness by creating channels for teams to share new ideas and provide insights to management. For instance, the financial management firm Workday holds weekly sessions where workers can give feedback about everything from their daily concerns to long-term career goals. The program helped Workday become one of *Fortune* magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For.

Leaders should also give clear information about what they expect from workers. As you lead, consider setting goals that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. This steady guidance, paired with

psychological safety, creates an exceptional environment for any type of work.

Effective leaders emphasize the value of physical and mental health.

For Harry, Born's son, getting through the school day was always a challenge. He was bursting with energy and often had difficulty concentrating in class or even staying still at his desk. The situation seemed hopeless. That is, until Harry discovered judo.

At eleven years old, Harry left mainstream school to enroll in the Frank Dando Sports Academy. This unique institution is designed to help children with diverse learning needs. Each morning begins with an hour of judo practice. Then, throughout the day, students engage in all sorts of other exercises.

The unconventional curriculum is extremely effective. The physical activity helps relieve aggression and burn off extra energy. So, when it comes time to

work, everyone is ready to get down to business.

The key message here is: Effective leaders emphasize the value of physical and mental health.

The Frank Dando Sports Academy helps students reach their potential because it makes a special effort to promote overall wellness. While students are encouraged to run, climb, swim, and practice martial arts, they're also encouraged to cut out junk food and are taught skills to navigate negative emotions.

The same practices that contribute to the students' well-being at school are also effective in the workplace. Just consider the multitude of studies which show the positive benefits of optimizing health. For instance, a recent study from the University of California examined businesses that instituted workplace wellness programs to incentivize healthy diets and regular exercise. It found that

these programs don't only result in happier, more alert workers – they also added about \$2,500 worth of productivity per employee to the company's bottom line.

Wellness also includes mental health. Sometimes, leaders put too much pressure or unrealistic deadlines on their teams. This approach can cause undue stress and anxiety, which ultimately hurts productivity. A Gallup survey found that workplaces with stress-inducing bosses have 49 percent more accidents and 60 percent more errors than high-functioning workplaces.

So, what can leaders do to promote overall wellness? To start, they can encourage workers to enjoy a little physical exercise during the day. That could mean providing workers with standing desks, holding meetings outside, or just letting people take breaks to stroll around. And if you notice

anyone is burning out, let them go home early or take a day off. The added benefit of the rest will surely make up for any lost hours.

Great leaders use language to guide, inspire, and collaborate.

When Jacinda Ardern was elected as Prime Minister of New Zealand, she knew there would be many challenges ahead. At the time, she was just 37 years old, making her the youngest female head of state in the world.

Still, Ardern was undaunted, and she stepped up to the role. As PM she implemented sweeping environmental programs, created thousands of jobs, and, when the country's Muslim community was struck by a horrific terrorist attack, she offered love and support. In a display of solidarity after the attack, she addressed Parliament with the words "as-salaam alaikum," an Arabic phrase meaning "peace be upon you."

Ardern's calming presence during a time of crisis shows how strong leadership

relies on both words and deeds. Aspiring leaders can learn from her example.

The key message here is: Great leaders use language to guide, inspire, and collaborate.

Whether at home or in the public sphere, leadership is all about the language you use to relate to other people. In this case, language means more than just the words you use – it also includes the tenor of your voice, the values you demonstrate, and the actions you take. When you consider your leadership language, you should try to embody six qualities: courage, strength, engineering, abdication, trust, and vulnerability.

For some of these qualities, the virtues are evident. Obviously, good leaders should have the courage to stand up for what's right and the strength to fight for what they believe. But for others, the advantages are more subtle. For

instance, the language of engineering is all about tactfully approaching complex situations. Smart engineers can step back, see the bigger picture, and recognize how and where to apply their efforts to achieve the desired outcome.

Abdication and vulnerability are similarly sophisticated qualities. Expressing vulnerability means being open to learn and to grow, while abdicating is all about knowing when to step back and let others take charge. A good leader knows they can't do everything alone. They'll embrace vulnerability and ask questions when they don't understand, and, when they need help, they'll know how to gracefully abdicate control to the expertise of others.

Mastering the language of leadership is a lifelong process. However, there are ways to cultivate these language skills. One strategy is to try role-playing. Imagine difficult scenarios where you would need

to call upon your language skills, and then practice working through them with someone you trust. This exercise works in both professional settings with colleagues and peers, or as a teaching tool for young children at home.

Every leader needs a vision.

You can't predict the future, but you can definitely plan for it. At least, this is what Andrew told himself when he first became a father. You see, Andrew was raised by a single mother and witnessed how difficult the world was for an impoverished woman. Knowing this, he wanted to ensure that his daughters were always financially secure.

So Andrew hatched a plan. He began teaching his daughters financial literacy at a very young age. When they were teenagers, he helped them start their own businesses selling eggs and baked goods. By the time they hit their twenties, each daughter had saved enough to buy her own home.

Why was Andrew so successful as a parent? It's simple: he had a clear vision for his family's future and developed a strategy to make it a reality.

The key message here is: Every leader needs a vision.

At the most basic level, having a vision requires two things. First, you must know your purpose – that is, what you want to achieve. And second, you must have a strategy or a plan to get there. Andrew's vision was clear. His purpose was to raise two self-sufficient and independent daughters, and his strategy was to begin cultivating financial skills early on.

Unfortunately, many parents and business leaders either fail to create a strong vision or they flounder when communicating it to others. According to Gallup's 2018 State of the American Workplace report, only a meager 22 percent of workers felt that their companies had a "clear direction." This lack of guidance is dangerous, as it can leave everyone feeling aimless and apathetic. Or, even worse, it can lead to

people haphazardly working in counterproductive ways.

In contrast, the company Patagonia has a strong vision. This outdoor clothing retailer aims to create a quality product while mitigating harm to people and the environment. To achieve this purpose, the company employs a carefully crafted strategy. To reduce waste, it manufactures durable and repairable clothing. To reduce harm, it gives its workers ample time off and only contracts with manufacturers who provide safe and fair work environments.

Finding your purpose isn't always easy, but it is essential. You can start by doing some serious introspection. Take some time to ask yourself important "why" questions about your role and how you're approaching it, like *Why am I doing this?* or *Why am I doing it this way?* Sometimes, the answers will be obvious. Other times, they'll reveal areas in which

you'll have to do some more thinking.
Still, if you take the processes seriously,
you'll eventually achieve the insight
needed to lead.

“Two of the hardest things I have done in my life are raising children and leading people. Yet they remain the most rewarding.”

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Raising children and managing a workplace have more in common than you might think – both pursuits require a strong suite of leadership skills. In both the professional and personal realms, good leaders provide love and support; create open, nonjudgmental environments; and craft and communicate a strong vision for the future. Achieving these goals isn't easy, but if you look to other successful leaders, from queens and prime ministers to parents and colleagues, you can find instructive examples of how to move forward.

Actionable advice:

Don't do it alone!

There's a tendency for both managers and parents to feel responsible for everything that happens around them. Yet, in reality, no one can operate completely on their own. It's important to recognize your interdependence with a wider community that includes your friends, family, colleagues, and social network. Take the time to keep these social connections strong, and always be on the lookout for moments where you can work together and provide mutual support.

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