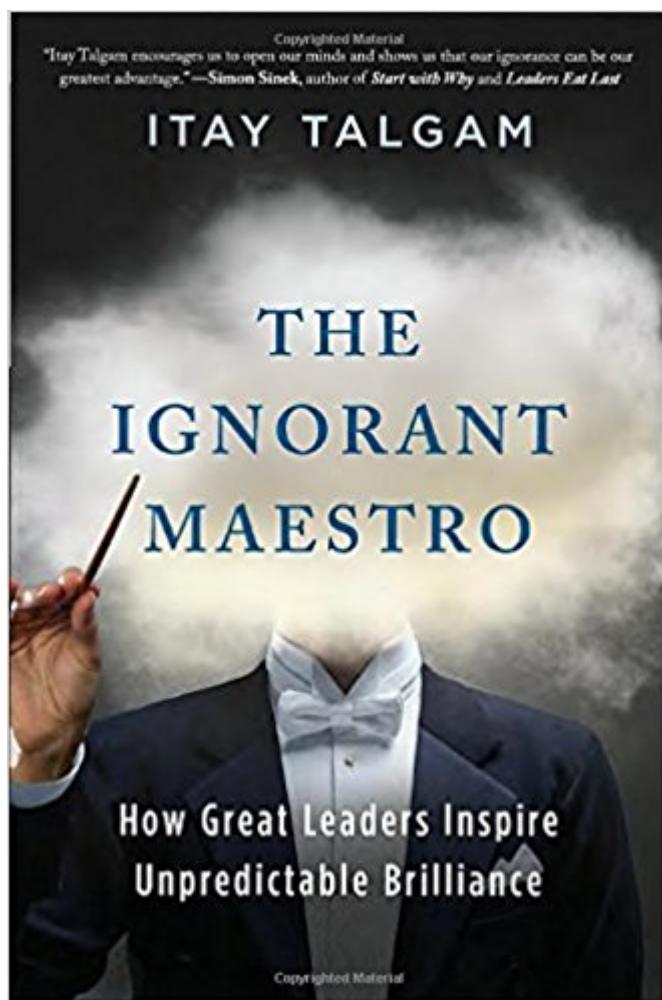


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The Ignorant Maestro: How Great Leaders Inspire Unpredictable Brilliance



Synopsis

“Choosing ignorance might seem a terrible quality to exhibit in your workplace” is a sure path down the stairs and out the corporate door. But stick with me here and see how it leads you upward. You’ll understand why great leaders embrace ignorance and use it to elevate their people to new heights of achievement.

A conductor in front of his orchestra is an iconic symbol of leadership—but what does a true maestro actually do to enable the right sort of cooperation among his players, leading to an excellent performance? If you think his primary job is making sure the musicians play the right notes, prepare to be surprised. For twenty years, in addition to conducting orchestras around the world, Itay Talgam has been a conductor of people for companies large and small, for CEOs of Fortune 500 companies as well as startup entrepreneurs, and beyond. Drawing on his decades of experience on the podium, he teaches nonmusicians how conducting really works and how the conductor’s art can help leaders in any field. In his lectures (including an acclaimed TED talk) and now in this book, Talgam shows why imposing your vision on your people is likely to backfire. Great conductors may know in advance how they want a piece to be played, but they make room for the creativity and passion of their musicians. They respect the gap between the baton and the instruments. They focus more on listening than on speaking. And they embrace their own ignorance, knowing that others may have better ideas than the conductor can imagine. Talgam explores the nuances of leadership by describing the distinctive styles of six world-famous conductors: the commanding Riccardo Muti, the fatherly and passionate Arturo Toscanini, the calm Richard Strauss, the gurulike Herbert von Karajan, the dancing Carlos Kleiber, and the master of dialogue Leonard Bernstein. All took different approaches to the age-old leadership dilemma: how to maximize both control and creative freedom at the same time. The Ignorant Maestro will empower you to help your own team make even more beautiful music. Talgam’s anecdotes and insights will change the way you think about listening, humility, and the path to unpredictable brilliance.

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Customer Reviews

“An enthralling portrait of some of music’s most fascinating conductors that serves as a vehicle for a remarkably thoughtful study of leadership. No musical experience needed. Itay Talgam brings the baton-wielding personalities to life, and the lessons ring clear.” •STANLEY MCCHRYSTAL, author of Team of Teams “Music is magic, and Itay Talgam’s book lets us stand beside him to revel in that magic in leadership and life.” •DAVID MARQUET, author of Turn the Ship Around! “A great conductor stands alone in front of an orchestra but knows that it is the collective genius of the group that creates something incredible. In this book, Itay Talgam reveals the counterintuitive lessons that business leaders can learn from world-famous conductors about empowering organizations and audiences.” •RYAN HOLIDAY, author of The Obstacle Is the Way “Talgam inspires us to think beyond leadership dogma and for the first time learn to truly listen.” •NIR EYAL, author of Hooked

ITAY TALGAM, a protégé and disciple of the great Leonard Bernstein, has conducted many prominent orchestras and ensembles worldwide, including the Orchestre de Paris, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, the Israel Philharmonic, and the Leipzig Opera House. He also teaches leadership to Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and universities, and at conferences around the world, including TED, Google’s Zeitgeist, and the World Economic Forum at Davos.

You have 70 employees, a pressing deadline, famous competitors and hundreds of difficult clients waiting for the product just in front of you. What is your best strategy: to rule by precise orders and

thinly veiled threats? To let every member flow creatively under your benevolent leadership? Would you lead by creative inspiration, by ruthless autocracy, by carefully engineered tactics or by your charm alone? You have to make a choice because you're the conductor now, at least for the next 220 pages: What will it be tonight, total freedom or total control? A little bit of both, of course. Itay Talgam writes beautifully, with an eloquent prose and timely anecdotes that are so rare in management books. His analysis of the 6-types of leadership, as illustrated by six famous conductors, is illuminating and should be required reading for business students and struggling politicians, for veteran managers and aspiring leaders. But above all this is a thought-provoking story about Empowerment, this tricky process that only truly great leaders learned to master. Itay Talgam is the ideal mentor for it -- funny, erudite, brilliant and immensely inspiring.

There are good and bad surprises. It was written with a much bigger reader circle in mind and would allow the book to be grouped under 'leadership', among other business and management books. The diversity of the training section from investment banks to schools and military group also reflected the need to use such a general approach on the orchestral conductor as a leader. The examples of famous conductors covering Muti, Toscanini, C Klieber, R Strauss, Von Karajan and Bernstein to classical music connoisseurs were a bit less satisfying. It might not seem right just to zoom into the leadership style without linkage to the insights, interpretation, talents and technical skills of the conductors of such echelon. But that's perhaps a topic for many other books.

Great insights to some of my fav maestros

An expansion on his TED talk and very enjoyable.

Nice book with handy hints and tips

Some years ago I went to the Hollywood Bowl to see Zubin Mehta conduct the LA Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. I couldn't take my eyes off Mehta who is a rather small man off stage but he becomes a Titan on the podium. I felt that he was drawing forth from each member of the orchestra beautiful music by osmosis. That symbiosis between a conductor and his musicians, between a corporate executive and his company is what this interesting and provocative book is all about. Author Itay Talgam is both an orchestra conductor and a conductor of people, a guru for executives and corporations. The goal is the most beautiful music possible or the greatest achievements

possible, and the hearts of all the players whether on Wall Street or Carnegie must be in the enterprise. A conductor is a virile, iconic symbol of leadership but a great maestro is not an autocrat. Whether a man is on a podium or in a director's chair, author Talgam explores and defines the nuances necessary to bring out the best performance in musicians or the fellow members of a corporation. An orchestra is not a place for prima donnas but every person whether a first violin or the guy that tinkles the triangle has to be imbued with enthusiasm, even eagerness and ambition to do his best not for glory to himself but glory to the whole. An executive has to allow for creative freedom in his group. He is the boss but he must supply his underlings with enthusiasm by letting them come forth with their own ideas. Passion is a big factor here. A violinist must play the proper notes but how he wrenches the tones issuing from his instrument is his to discover and make his own. But he is contributing to the whole, the glorious sound of a great orchestra. In between a conductor's baton and the members of an orchestra there is a gap. There is a gap, really, between all people. The maestro or the corporation CEO fills this gap by listening. The members of each may have great ideas, suggestions and sheer talent and the maestro or boss must have his ear to the ground. This is definitely a two way street. Neither the executive nor the conductor is in isolation on a pinnacle. Harmony can only prevail when everybody is allowed to do his thing. Not playing any old note, of course, but coaxing his instrument, being a dynamic member of a corporation group. Author Talgam explores the style of six world-class conductors. The approach in each case is how each maestro controls and yet inspires his players. It is helpful to run these famous musicians through Google to witness their performance on the podium. You can check out Arturo Toscanini temper tantrums (all bark and no bite), The six conductors are Riccardo Muti (autocratic but he pulls forth glorious music from his orchestra); the emotional and passionate Arturo Toscanini; the sedate Richard Strauss; the aristocratic Herbert von Karajan; the incredibly agile Carlos Kleiber; the charismatic, handsome Leonard Bernstein. The title "The ignorant Maestro" bothers me just a bit- it's that word ignorant. Certainly any executive, conductor or entrepreneur will find many gaps between himself and his players, areas in which he has to fill in and even embrace because hidden in those gaps may be superb talent, a wealth of ideas, cutting edge originality. But ignorant implies to me a lack of education not a lack of understanding, a lack of information of his group. But I won't belabor the point. The book is highly original, and Talman appears as a very knowledgeable and likable guy with plenty of talent to spare. The bottom line here is that when the players on a stage- any players, any stage- give up on self expression, "when the joy of discovery and creativity have been buried by routine" a vital element has disappeared. And somehow when I see a conductor

raise his baton to signal the start of a piece, I am irresistibly reminded of Charlton Heston as Moses raising his staff and parting the Red Sea. Perhaps Moses and the conductor and the CEO are all part of the same thing.

If you are interested in how organizations and businesses work, and if you are looking for some solid tools for observing and improving how your own organization works, this is the book for you. "The Ignorant Maestro" is a loosely written and enjoyable examination of several classical conductors, and their relationships with their musicians. Talgam corporations and other businesses can benefit from lessons that Talgam has learned from both his own experience as a conductor and his own observation of other conductors he has observed and respected over the years. The conductors he describes here run the gamut from ones who are dictatorial in their stance, insisting that their way is the only way, to others who take a back seat, allowing their orchestras to find their own way into the performance, only asserting control when things break down. A crucial skill Talgam describes for any leader is what he calls "Keynote Listening" - essentially the skill of being able to set aside your own ego and listen to the professionals you've surrounded yourself with as they explain and teach you what they can do and what they see their roles as inside the orchestra/organization. A good leader blends the ability to offer direction when required, but also to know when a player is capable of doing it on his or her own without undue and unwanted guidance. The book is not intended to be applied as a formula - but a collection of guidelines and suggestions which can be used piecemeal or as a whole. It's a wonderful little book, and anyone who reads it will glean some benefits!

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