

Use Struggle to Become a Better Leader

Severe challenge can be your greatest opportunity.

By Terrence Fernsler

Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow through Challenge and Adversity. By Steven Snyder. Softcover. 206 pages. Berrett-Koehler Publishers (bkconnection.com).

Struggle often unlocks great potential for growth, if leaders can learn skills, capabilities, and practices that help them thrive in the midst of challenge and diversity. While some people repeat the same mistakes over and over, great leaders use setbacks as wake-up calls. They learn to work with others to achieve some larger purpose. Learning from struggle helps make leadership an enlightening journey.

Seeing struggle through this lens affirms its value. New strategies and practices emerge, and leaders can get to the next level of their vocation. With this attitude, opportunities for change can come from adversity and what at first may seem devastating failure.

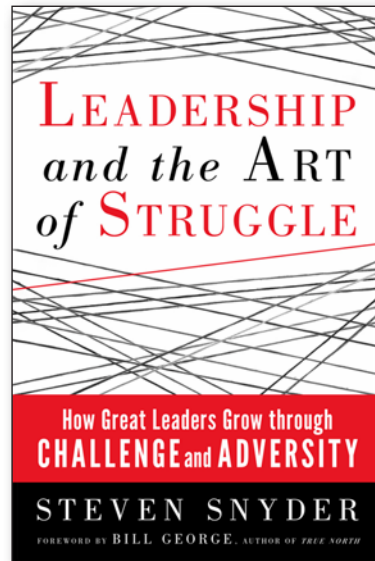
Setbacks can leave you feeling out of balance, tense, and too ready to act reflexively on the visible signs of struggle. It's important to get beyond the symptoms to understand the real causes. Becoming grounded is the first step to reframing and learning through hardship.

Adapting to — rather than repeating — setbacks comes from being grounded. In *Leadership and the Art of the Struggle*, Steven Snyder offers ideas to help you get grounded, but readily admits there are more ways than those he presents. Once grounded, you can more easily reframe the issue and explore new paths to resolving it.

His suggestions for learning from misfortune are well worth reading. You can learn to take such steps every time a challenge appears. Anticipating various scenarios and being disciplined keeps you in control of setbacks. In addition, Snyder emphasizes celebrating what's important to avoid letting problems consume you.

While Snyder profiles leaders who dealt with difficulties to demonstrate how successful people learned from struggling through them, he recognizes that everyone's path will be unique. The art of the struggle is how we grow as we journey through it and bring life to our core values. This book provides guidance for learning from and improving our leadership by working past and through obstacles.

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Reinvent Yourself

What's needed during times of struggle? Often, you'll need to reimagine the situation and reinvent yourself. Here are a few ways to do so:

- Write down all the people you can rely on for support.** Then make a list of your needs for support (both now and in the future). Place your two lists side by side, and match your needs with the people in your support network. Are there things you need that you can't find within your current network? It's these gaps that are most important. Here lie your opportunities to build connections for your long-term needs as you continue to develop as a leader.
- If you're facing a current challenge, first take time to acknowledge the emotions you're feeling.** Find someone to talk to — a coach, mentor, peer, or friend. Just discussing the problem may help you see new solutions. Ask yourself: Are my old styles of leadership working for me right now? What do I need to change about myself to better adapt to my current situation?
- List behaviors that are adaptive and those that interfere with your effective functioning.** What outdated behaviors and beliefs could you shed in exchange for more resilient perspectives? Dig deeply to discover the beliefs that underlie your counterproductive behaviors. When you change your beliefs, you change your perspective, which changes everything.