



*Excerpt pgs. 62-63: Self Mastery*

Mort Meyerson's awakening started when he accepted an invitation to become CEO of Perot Systems, a computer services company. In the first six months at his new job he began to realize that, compared to the organizational world he had known years earlier as CEO of the computer services giant EDS, everything was different—not just the technology, the market, and the customers, but also the people who worked for him and their reasons for working.

He realized that he too must change. As he wrote about it in a surprisingly revealing and introspective article, “Everything I thought I knew about leadership was

wrong. My first job as a leader was to create a new understanding of myself.”

Meyerson went through what he describes as a time of “intense self-examination,” wrestling with questions that went to the heart of the leadership style he had prided himself on. He came to see that during his years running EDS, he had been both extremely successful and extremely ruthless. To be sure, under his stewardship EDS saw profits climb every quarter without exception, making many employees with equity wealthy, but in looking back, Meyerson also saw that he had created immense personal misery for his employees even as he made them rich. At EDS eighty-hour work weeks were typical, people were shuffled from place to place without a second thought about the disruptions it might cause in their lives—and no questioning was tolerated. The employees' term for assignments there was “death march”; the cultural tone was, as Meyerson put it, “young, male and military.”

While at EDS, Meyerson headed a fifty-person team designing the federal system for processing Medicare claims, with everyone working eighteen-hour days in order to meet a deadline. One day, despite a heavy snow, every member of the team made it to work except for one, Max Hopper. Meyerson, furious, called him up and bawled him out. Hopper left the company at the first opportunity—and went on to revolutionize the

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airline reservation industry with his invention of the SABRE computerized reservation system.

Recalling his alienation of Hopper, a brilliant, talented employee, Meyerson admitted he was too quick to make harsh judgments, too slow to see things from other people's perspectives. Reflecting on the human cost of his old style years later, Meyerson came to realize that what he had considered strengths were now more clearly identifiable as weaknesses. For example, at EDS his communications with employees were in the old hierarchical model: "I showed up onstage every six months and delivered a pep rally speech." His memos went only to the top dozen people; he had virtually no contact with the rest of his employees.

With the realization that a leader today needs to be receptive to honest, direct messages from anywhere and everywhere in a company, Meyerson changed his ways. He got an email address that received thousands of messages a month—all of which he read—from all over the company. He even fired off a congratulatory email to a team that made a competitive sale—and did so within an hour of their victory.

"Before you can lead others, before you can help others, you have to discover yourself," says Joe Jaworski, formerly with Royal Dutch Shell's scenario planning group. "If you want a creative explosion to take place, if you want the kind of performance that leads to truly exceptional results, you have to be willing to embark on a journey that leads to an alignment between an individual's personal values and aspirations and the values and aspirations of the company."