



SI-Empowerment Net Milano
Christmas Lunch
Circolo die Canottieri Olona, December 2023, Milan
Book presentation *"6 Leadership Skills"*

#1 What are the 6 Leadership Skills and who is the book for?

I'd like to begin by saying something general about the book—the full title is: *"6 Leadership Skills to Become Game Changers. Subtitle: How to Create a Reliable, Empowering, and Productive Work Environment for the Well-being of People and Organizations."*

The book is—intentionally—a short and compact work, focusing solely on 6 leadership skills amid the vast literature on leadership.

120 pages, 6 concise chapters, each with two double pages featuring key insights at the beginning of each chapter, 21 action accelerators. There is also a glossary at the end, as I've used many English terms. Furthermore, at the end of each chapter, there are at least two pages for taking notes. There are different versions of the book, and the English ones feature a foreword and an afterword by two leaders whom I consider very smart.

-> The language of the book is simple, clear, and authentic because I want to speak to the heart of the readers. After all, the decision to change behavior is not only made in the head but, above all, in the heart.

-> My intention was to create a compact book that serves as a companion and a source of inspiration for discussing the 6 Key Leadership Skills, encouraging their internalization and, equally importantly, their practical application.

-> This is not just about managers, but every individual within the organization. It is also crucial for the quality of interactions, as these define whether the work environment will be healthy or toxic. The work environment makes the difference between motivated and inspired people who work productively and those who struggle more!

-> Depending on the quality of interactions—such as the lack of space to value people or the absence of listening—people can suffer immensely, losing energy and draining the energy of others. In some cases, this situation can lead to high stress and even burnout, a phenomenon I often encounter during coaching sessions with my clients. I am currently working with professors from a German university who experience this reality every day.

-> To answer your question: the book is aimed at middle management, at every manager and executive who possesses a certain capacity for self-reflection. It is also for leaders and team leaders who wish to develop leadership skills, particularly relevant in this historical period, marked by the post-pandemic, the energy crisis, and climate change.

These 6 Skills enable you to:

- Show vulnerability while being courageous at the same time.
- Listen proactively to gain the trust of others.
- Create a "Safe Space" for yourself and the team.
- Give and receive authentic and valuable feedback.
- Value people and encourage them.
- Create a healthy work atmosphere where people are motivated to give even more.
- Grow and develop as individuals and as an organization.
- Develop a transformational leadership model.

-> When I hear that someone sometimes considers these skills as "soft skills," I feel a bit irritated. These skills are anything but "soft."

They are relational skills, human skills. They are by no means easy to learn and train! It's not just about being empathetic or showing empathy as a leader but about shaping relationships, shaping human interaction at work and within a team. Naturally, this applies both to profit and non-profit organizations like Soroptimist International.

These are human and relational skills, crucial in both private and professional settings.

They promote constructive, healthy, and humane interaction.

They make people feel good because they ensure their basic needs are met (the need to be: accepted, listened to, considered, valued, and encouraged).

They are core skills for anyone aspiring to lead others, starting with themselves.

They are "Must Have" skills for anyone aiming to increase their joy in what they do and, not least, their productivity.

Poorly trained human skills, as well as the following: knowing how to manage difficult conversations, how to have effective confrontations, and how to give and receive feedback.

-> These skills are defined as "essential" for virtuous leadership. Without them, one cannot speak of a leader, but only of an authoritarian manager. It's about a new managerial culture, a new form of leadership.

-> Acquiring, training, and sharing these skills with everyone in our interactions here, even within SI, is crucial. We should define together the rules of conduct on how we want to communicate with each other, on how and where we can express our appreciation: what can our club/organization do to become a safe space.

Only by working (even when we do volunteer work, as we are doing now) in an environment that we perceive as safe (i.e., where we do not fear making mistakes, being discriminated against, or criticized) can we work well, be motivated, feel serene, find meaning, and, not least, be productive. In short: we and our organization can thrive in a safe space!

#2 There's an appendix in the book with a call to women managers. Why did you address women specifically? What is your message to them?

-> I placed the appendix in the final chapter, "Encourage," and naturally, I did so intentionally. What I experience daily in my coaching sessions, and which can also be demonstrated historically and culturally, is that women, compared to men, have received little or no encouragement as a matter of principle over the last 2,000 years. Women weren't allowed to study, work, vote, and in many countries, this remains true today.

-> In other words, we women generally experience fewer moments of encouragement, whether within the family, in a relationship, at work, or in the many other organizations where we are active. Having received less empowerment has had fatal consequences: we suffer from a chronic lack of self-esteem, confidence, and security in ourselves, and we tend to be extremely dependent on external validation.

-> That's why I crafted this section as an "extra dose of encouragement" for female readers, addressing them directly. Something extraordinary is happening worldwide right now: more and more women are showing exceptional leadership capabilities, demonstrating talent in the way they lead, and exhibiting relevant leadership skills. From my perspective as a leadership coach, women are achieving significant success as leaders because they possess and apply the necessary skills to navigate these turbulent times.

#3. What are the most important points you shared with professional women across Europe?

I use to talk about these 5 aspects that make leadership inclusive:

- Investing in people, as they are the most important resource, even in SI.
- Cultivating diversity and viewing it as an enrichment.
- Staying human (empathy is a great "trust builder").
- Courage and vulnerability.
- Promoting a culture free from fear.

I also love to talk about 5 aspects that make leadership innovative:

- Being inclusive.
- The ability to think and see things in a new way, thus promoting a culture of innovation.
- Having positive relational energy (this is a new aspect that still receives too little attention, but it's a key indicator of success).
- Coaching skills (I conducted a workshop on this point).
- Becoming a game-changer (i.e., changing the rules of the game).

My key idea, "*Leadership is not about you, leadership is all about others!*" embodies a people-centered and empathetic approach, in stark contrast to traditional authoritarian leadership styles.

In "Modern Leadership," the focus on people and human interpersonal interaction is fundamental. This approach challenges the classic concept of a leader who leads from above, highlighting the importance of listening, valuing, and investing in the people who make up the organization.

#4 I know there is a recurring question that every organization asks: "How do we attract talents and how can we retain them?" What is your answer?

-> Yes, I did hear this question often in various contexts, in for-profit as well in nonprofit organizations, most of them are facing this phenomenon, and this can be observed worldwide. This cannot be denied.

-> My answer to the question is, very honest. As a business coach, I find that the way this question is posed is not optimal, not truly useful, because it only focuses on the problem and is not very solution-oriented. -> I invite you to change your perspective and to reframe the question differently, following the motto: "*Look at problems and see the possibilities they offer.*"

I ask the following question: -> Are we ready to create an organization so that candidates, new team members as well long-time members can experience Soroptimist International as an ideal place for volunteer work? And let's also ask ourselves the following questions:

- What is preventing us from doing so?
- How can we create an ideal place for volunteer work?
- What do people want?
- In what atmosphere do they want to stay and live?

These, in my view, are meaningful and more effective questions to ask ourselves.

-> We all work and know that there can be problems and conflicts with colleagues and/or superiors. That the work environment is often not respectful, that power games exist, that people often do not speak on an equal footing. We suffer from this and, in some way, accept it because we think it's part of our job: we get paid, we receive a salary. We hope the situation will improve, but if it doesn't, we mentally withdraw, and the so-called "quiet quitting" phenomenon occurs: people remain at work but are not motivated, inspired, or engaged. They are hardly productive or willing to "go the extra mile."

-> Let's imagine that, most likely, we won't engage in "quiet quitting" at work, but that, due to stress, we decide to volunteer for an organization in our free time and invest our free time and energy there. We don't do it for the money—money doesn't matter here—but because we share the organization's mission and vision. What do you think happens if we are also stressed there, if we have problems interacting with others, or if the person leading has little to no leadership skills and speaks with little empathy, for example? In the best case, the person who invested time and energy there will become less or almost uninvolved in the future; if stress, conflicts, and power games continue, the person will leave the organization. Does that make sense?

-> Managers - and here I'm also referring to women in leadership positions within this organisation - should no longer ignore issues such as the "safe space." What does that mean? It means that you, as a manager, must take care of the people working with you by offering them an environment where they can open up, provide authentic feedback, and not feel criticized or judged. An environment where people treat each other with respect, meet on equal terms, refrain from power games to work well together, and, above all, enjoy working on projects together.

#5 What are the most relevant skills for Soroptimists, the so-called "must-have" skills?

-> To ensure that all members, sharing the same vision of creating a better world for women and girls, are engaged in impactful projects at national and international levels, it is essential to work well and respectfully together, communicate effectively, and possess important leadership skills. We all know that, as a rule, each of us must take on the role of President at least once.

-> What does this mean? It means it is necessary to have well-developed relational skills. The person who assumes the role of president should train these skills, for example, by admitting they don't always have a ready solution, practicing active listening, showing appreciation, providing security, and offering encouragement. It's essential to organize the club in such a way that it is perceived as a safe space for all Sorores. Each of us decides to invest our free time and energy in SI. Let's not forget that.

If these "essential elements"—relational skills—are present, and there is a basic attitude of openness, which I call openness of the heart, openness of the mind, and openness of the will, then a great atmosphere in the SI club is almost guaranteed. With this basic openness, respect for diversity, inclusive behavior, and genuine interest in people provide the foundation for good cooperation. The members will not mentally "check out" (quiet quit), nor will they leave the organization. Do you see, does this make sense?