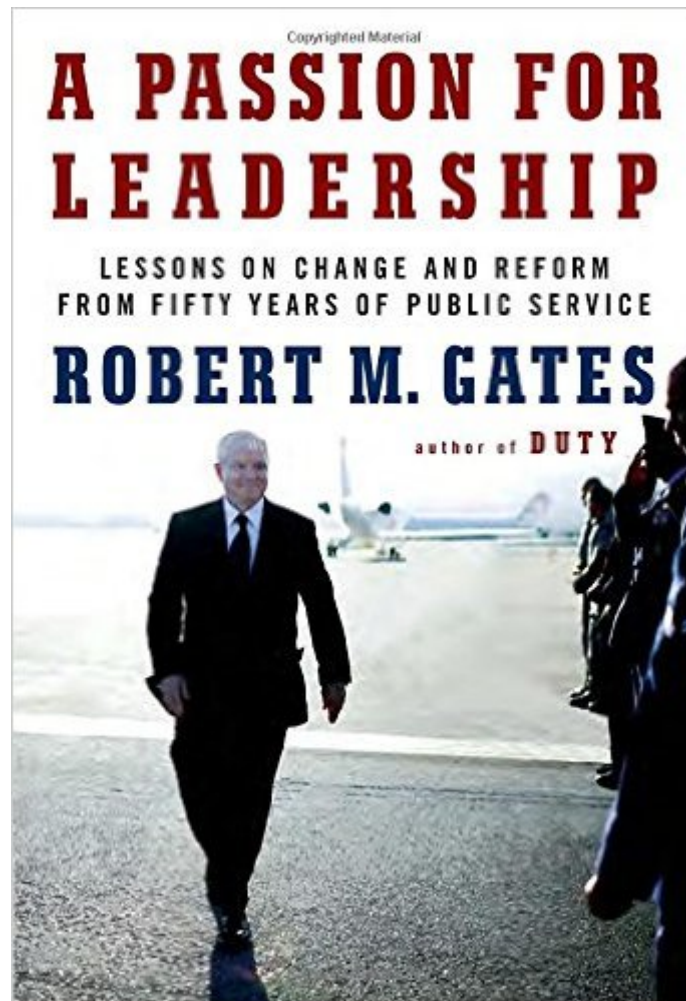


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# A Passion For Leadership: Lessons On Change And Reform From Fifty Years Of Public Service



## Synopsis

From the former secretary of defense and author of the acclaimed #1 best-selling memoir *Duty*, a characteristically direct, informed, and urgent assessment of why big institutions are failing us and how smart, committed leadership can effect real improvement regardless of scale. Across the realms of civic and private enterprise alike, bureaucracies vitally impact our security, freedoms, and everyday life. With so much at stake, competence, efficiency, and fiscal prudence are essential, yet Americans know these institutions fall short. Many despair that they are too big and too hard to reform. Robert Gates disagrees. Having led change successfully at three monumental organizations—the CIA, Texas A&M University, and the Department of Defense—he offers us the ultimate insider’s look at how major bureaus, organizations, and companies can be transformed, which is by turns heartening and inspiring and always instructive. With practical, nuanced advice on tailoring reform to the operative culture (we see how Gates worked within the system to increase diversity at Texas A&M); effecting change within committees; engaging the power of compromise (in the real world of bureaucratic institutions, you almost never get all you want when you want it); and listening and responding to your team, Gates brings the full weight of his wisdom, candor, and devotion to civic duty to inspire others to lead desperately needed change.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Knopf; 1 edition (January 19, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 030795949X

ISBN-13: 978-0307959492

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (102 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #33,429 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > Business & Money > Processes & Infrastructure > Government & Business #58 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > Leadership #80 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > United States > Executive Branch

## Customer Reviews

This is a well written but sure to be somewhat controversial book- not so much because what is in it, but who wrote it: Robert M Gates served as the 22nd United States Secretary of Defense from 2006

to 2011. Gates served for 26 years in the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council, and was Director of Central Intelligence. After leaving the CIA, Gates became president of Texas A&M University. Currently, chancellor of the College of William and Mary. Impressive indeed, but Gates has been criticized for intelligence failures during the decline and disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, that one failure in so many decades of public service does not mar this solid book on Leadership. Gates goes into what it takes to be a leader who can get results without creating unnecessary enemies. Very important. "The important thing to remember is that in any public or private sector organization, whether it has three million employees or three, having a clearly defined and achievable vision or set of goals and getting priorities right in moving forward are preconditions for successfully leading change." "The task of reforming institutions is a difficult one. A leader's heart must be on fire with belief in what she seeks to do. Changing institutions is a battle, and she must undertake it with courage, strength, and conviction." Gates examples drawn from his decades of public service are the best part of the book, as they show how bureaucracy and upper-level leadership function, in real life scenarios. Very revealing.

Upon hearing Secretary Gates speak at the US Naval Academy commencement several years ago I found myself actually listening rather than day-dreaming about my mis-spent youth on the Severn. I thought Secretary Gates a Bush Crony, someone that would spew the party line justifying why we were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, he focused on the thousand or so young men and women before him. He lauded them and challenged them, prepared them for the difficulties ahead while soothing their (and their parents') anxiety about the difficulties that lay ahead. I felt lifted in the wake and wisdom of his words and admiring him from afar, now regard both his words and his accomplishments as a real beacon to young and old alike; an oracle, if you will, of what our government and our institutions can and should be. Robert Gates is an American leader in the line of George Marshall. Not merely a patriot but a leader, many times over, in his own right.

Hardly a day passes in any American's life without him/her having to confront a bureaucracy - standing in line, or dialing a phone number and entering an automated labyrinth and being placed on indefinite hold. Yet, even as bureaucracies extend their reach into most every nook and cranny, the litany of their incompetence and arrogance grows. Some of their lapses and failures in recent years, regardless of which party was in charge, include: the failure of intelligence and law enforcement associated with 9/11, the failure of our financial regulatory and administrative bodies to

anticipate and prevent abuses that led to the Great Recession of 2008-09, FEMA's handling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Flint water crisis, the lack of planning for post-invasion Iraq in 2003, the scandalous treatment of outpatients at Walter Reed Army Hospital, lapses and scandals of the Secret Service, the initial handling of the Ebola crisis by CDC, the botched rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare), underperforming public schools, the inability to control our southern border, etc. It is a rare soul who has not been frustrated and maddened by delays involving multiple business/government bureaucracies, not to mention disastrous decisions/inertia that cost jobs and create economic turmoil. As a rule, organizations that do not promote innovation, strive to reduce overhead costs and excessive layers, and become more customer-friendly don't do well in the long term. The public sector faces unique obstacles to reform, whether it's cutting costs, becoming more efficient, encouraging innovation, or changing to cope with changes. The political Left is too often indifferent to obvious bureaucratic incompetence and failure because it believes that whatever the problem, government is the solution. But it's tough making the case for more government when what we have works so poorly. The political Right welcomes bureaucratic incompetence as proof that government rarely does anything well, and sometimes deliberately or unknowingly creates those problems - eg. cutting IRS funding to levels that make proper service/analysis impossible, and demanding Rube Goldberg details within the Affordable Care Act. Fortunately, author Gates's 50 years of experience at the CIA, Texas A&M University, and the Department of Defense. has convinced him that bureaucracies can be fixed. The really good news is that during his career, he saw an extraordinary number of people of the highest quality serving with steadfast integrity and love of this nation. (Unfortunately, they too are often frustrated by the shortcomings of their institutions.) Virtually, all public bureaucracies report directly or indirectly to elected officials. Their political interests (getting reelected usually is foremost) are often in direct conflict with efforts to streamline/reform the institutions they oversee. Elective bodies with oversight responsibilities also are unreliable and even irresponsible - how can any organization do long-range planning when it never knows from one year to the next how much money will be approved? Then there's also shutdowns, sequestration, and micromanagement. Imagine a company with a board of 535 directors, each of whom has as his/her principal objective personal self-interest and political self-preservation as opposed to responsibility to the institution(s) he/she oversees. Another factor in the oversight of institutions, mainly public ones, is the uneven quality of the individuals elected or appointed to fulfill the role. Too often they know virtually nothing about important topics. A third major problem is that, at least at the most senior levels, many bosses in public institutions lack managerial or leadership experience. (Look at Obama's experience prior to becoming President;

McCain's wasn't much better. Ted Cruz, Bernie Sanders?) Many appointees hope or expect to be in the position for a relatively short time - seeing it as a stepping-stone to something else. Such short-term stewards avoid controversial moves, fail to prioritize, and underinvests. Still another reality would-be reforms face in the public sector is that almost every career employee has some form of job security - tenure and its rough equivalent is not limited to universities. Conversely, the top bosses generally have limited tenure, creating similar problems. Gates continues - if you think removing ineffective individuals in a bureaucracy is difficult, try eliminating an agency or program once created. Another point - business does not have to take seriously the influence of retirees or alumni as do a number of public institutions. Bureaucratic reform must also overcome growing demand for transparency in decision-making. Further, plans for change are publicly aired by leaks, regulation, or state law, creating inviting targets for advocates of the status quo. The culture of public bureaucracies and too many private sector organizations is another serious obstacle to change and reform. Fundamental to bureaucratic culture is risk avoidance - it is almost always safer for the public bureaucrat (often in business also) to say no rather than yes. Further, the proliferation of investigative bodies, inspectors general, outside 'think' tanks, and politicians looking for someone to hang for every single hiccup, contributes not just to risk aversion but inaction. Also fundamental to bureaucratic culture both in business and the public sector is the 'not invented here' reaction, especially if it comes from a known critic. Supervisors too often reject his own employees' ideas for improvement simply because they were not his ideas. The idea of willfully shrinking one's empire to make the enterprise more successful borders on heresy, and there is no financial incentive to do so in a public entity. Public institutions are often not served well by their conviction that no one outside the institution can possibly understand what those in it do, how they do it, or why. (Definitely my experience with public schools.) This is strengthened by the near-total absence of competition to public bureaucracies. The final obstacle to reform unique to public institutions is the absence of any economic incentive to do so. Further, management has almost no authority to affect the pay of those working for them, except through promotions and even those are governed largely by 'time in grade' requirements, and availability of positions at the higher grade. Too many smug institutions are running on the momentum of past achievements, and moving obliviously toward mediocrity and irrelevance. These include G.M. and Chrysler from the private sector - prior to their bailout. Such institutions need bold, visionary leaders who discern a different and better future for it, and who can map a realistic path to attaining the future. Gates suggests that a new leader not focus on reorganizing - it is distracting. employees will be preoccupied with whether their personal and office status has improved or declined, as well as whether they might find themselves out of a job. Be

wary of consensus - inevitably yields the lowest common denominator, set short deadlines - focuses attention on an effort, and not emphasize lots of overtime - he boasts that, while heading the Pentagon, he never went to the office on a Saturday. He is skeptical that leadership qualities such as devotion to duty, sincerity, fairness and good cheer can be taught in a classroom. Before issuing a single directive or making a single decision, a new leader should talk to people at every level of his organization. If appropriate to the position, the new leader should also talk to stakeholders, governing boards, retirees, alumni, legislators, and customers - asking about the organization's strengths and weaknesses, what its priorities for change should be. This will also allow the leader to spot self-promoters (suck-ups, untrustworthy), those who cynically trash colleagues, and determine who is likely to be an ally. The process also sends the message to employees that their opinions matter, and that candor is valued. However, this mustn't go on too long or that would give the impression that he/she hasn't a clue. The new leader should make it clear from the outset that he intends to establish goals early and seek out reactions to her ideas. An election eg. 14 months later might end their tenure, thus they must move fast. External circumstances and challenges must take center stage in developing the agenda for change. When establishing an agenda for reform, a leader will almost always be going against the consensus in much of what he does. People will think he's wrong, and tell him so. Carefully considered implementation strategies are critical to reforming bureaucracies - it takes more than a bold agenda for change. It is imperative early on to reassure (or disarm) those who will be apprehensive about a leader's intentions - most everyone. A leader's strategy needs to include carefully choosing his lieutenants - ones that both agree with his agenda and have organizational credibility and skills. Before any meeting, press conference, or presentation, be thinking of how to advance the reform agenda. Gates says he always tried to set aside an hour or so every day to work on/think about his reform agenda. Too many leaders give too little thought to sequencing/prioritizing change initiatives. Too ambitious, he will dissipate his energy, lose momentum, and fail. Whenever possible, popular and easier should be made first, tougher ones later. When Gates took command of the Pentagon he found that outpatient wounded soldiers were being neglected. Firing the Walter Reed hospital commander, the surgeon general of the army, and the secretary of the army within 3 months (after receiving the report of an outside investigative task force) changed that. Fundamental to bringing about change is inclusiveness. Gates relied on ad hoc groups rather than existing bureaucratic structures (the latter almost never comes up with bold actions/recommendations. Bureaucracy is incapable of reforming itself. Task forces and similar ad hoc groups are silo-busters. They must have a specific date for extinction. He saw the time taken (about 7 months) for surveys, focus groups, etc. on repeal of DADT key to a smooth transition,

much better than accomplished via presidential edict. People at every level need to know their work is considered important by higher-ups. At every level, a leader should strive to make his employees proud to be who they are and doing what they do. However, this admittedly gets complicated if an organization's mission and goals aren't clear. A leader must also ensure their work really contributes, and doesn't just end up on a shelf. A leader should also be very sparing in publicly criticizing those beneath him on the organization ladder. A successful leader or reformer never misses an opportunity to give credit to those working for him - groups and individuals. A successful leader must always be evaluating those around and below him - empowering the strong, trying to help those showing promise despite shortcomings, and getting rid of the deadwood. Accountability is essential to any successful reform effort. Periods of budget stringency are unparalleled opportunities for reform leaders to implement changes.

I enjoyed Robert Gates, first memoir, "Duty" which was an assessment of how large institutions are consistently failing us, as a whole and how beneficial leaders can change them. So it was a natural to follow up with his latest volume, entitled "A Passion for Leadership". Robert Gates served eight U.S. presidents in both parties as defense secretary and CIA director. He is now the president of the Boy Scouts of America. This is written more as a guide to leading large institutions through reform and change. Gates brings his ideas to life by recounting his own stories of his critical leadership roles. Gates shares his wisdom, humility, and devotion to his own civic duty, as an example to inspire others to lead. Robert Gates previously has stated that President Obama believes he is smarter than his advisers and that he surrounds himself with people who will not question his views. As a result, the White House has struggled to develop and implement effective strategy during the Obama administration. "You know, the president is quoted as having said at one point to his staff, 'I can do every one of your jobs better than you can,'" Gates says. "This title is a must-read for anyone who wants to invoke change within an organization and have leading principles to follow. It is an inspiration for a younger generation of people, interested in entering public service positions. I enjoyed it! Hope it helps:)

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