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Book Review: 21 Success Sutras for Leaders by M.S. Rao

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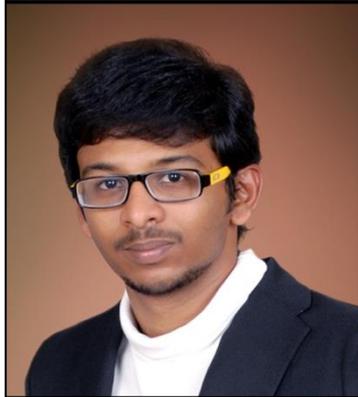
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Book Review: *21 Success Sutras for Leaders*

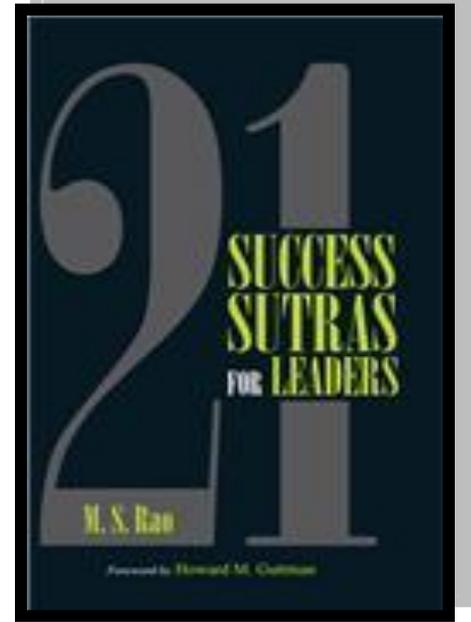
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Forward by: HOWARD M. GUTTMAN

PEARSON EDUCATION, 2012

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“There is only one thing more painful than learning from experience, and that is not learning from experience.”

— Archibald MacLeish, *poet*

An Overview

Professor M. S. Rao's *21 Success Sutras for Leaders* (“*Success Sutras*”) offers keen, managerial insight into the benefits of learning from the experiences of others — whether disadvantageous, banal, or extremely useful. Acclaimed as an international, authoritative resource on leadership, *Success Sutras* equips the reader with 21 leadership tools and techniques designed to minimize mistakes and maximize leadership effectiveness. Its 22 chapters and 176 pages provide examples and illustrations of international leaders and their respective styles of principled leadership paradigms.

Having earned acclaim from such international management thinkers as Marshall Goldsmith, Jim Kouzes, Brian Tracy, Richard Bevan, Colin Gautrey, Tony Alessandra, and Howard M. Guttman, author Rao is recognized as an internationally-renowned leadership “guru” with 33 years of experience. He is the author of 25 books predominantly

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centering upon leadership styles. With *Success Sutras*, Rao introduces a new leadership perspective, i.e., “soft leadership.” He attempts to stir the passions of his readers and seeks to cultivate, and ultimately transform, ordinary individuals into extraordinary leaders.

The Highlights

Success Sutras unveils the following 21 points of interest and leadership tools:

1. **Leadership is a responsibility, not a badge of honor:** Leadership is not a rank or title; it is a position accompanied by responsibility: “Leadership is not a brass ring you can grab. It is a gift presented to you by your employees after you have proven yourself worthy of having it.”¹ Hence, true leadership cannot be claimed, it must be earned and deserved.
2. **Character counts, not charisma:** Leaders succeed in the corporate world with character and competence. But given the choice between character and competence, character takes precedence. A person with character has a better chance of acquiring, developing, and retaining knowledge.
3. **Be a coach, not a critic:** Coaches should provide constructive feedback, not criticism. Criticism is *individual*-centric and is often repugnant to the recipient while feedback is *behavior*-centric and helps to bring about behavioral changes.
4. **Build bridges, not barriers:** Leadership is all about breaking down barriers and building bridges. Leaders must create trust and good will among others. This takes time, and can be a casualty of deadlines and other work pressures. However, if individuals in leadership roles find time to build relationships and exercise patience, they can avoid organizational casualties and thus help to ensure organizational excellence.
5. **Fight for pretty things, not petty things:** Concentrating on the insignificant diverts the mind and wastes precious time. People who expend and dedicate so much of their time and talents to issues of *de minimus* worth lose sight of beneficial opportunities.
6. **Strive for excellence, not perfection:** *In Search of Excellence – Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies*, published by McKinsey’s Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, became widely known for its “7-S framework” of strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style, and sharing values. This paradigm was derived from the managerial practices of 43 of the *Fortune 500* list of top-performing companies in America. Jim Collins’s book, *Built to Last*, was researched among 18 companies within this list. Ostensibly, companies crave excellence to stay ahead of the competition.
7. **Failure is only a comma, not a full stop:** Success is not counted by the size of one’s initial entry into the market. Most start-up companies experience initial setbacks. The failure rate among first-generation entrepreneurs is indisputably significant, representing an overall deterrent to innovation and creativity. Thus, it

¹ Thom, B. Fourteen guides to becoming a successful leader. *Public Management*, 78 (11), pp.14-16.

is imperative that business leaders, as well as government leaders, learn from their failures in order to persevere and ultimately progress.

8. **Never say "no" too soon and "yes" too late:** Every problem has prospects in disguise. Every threat provides inherent opportunities. Leaders need to view such seemingly risky challenges as opportunities rather than threats. Each decision must be deliberative – weighing all possible outcomes – rather than perfunctory – which may lead to premature and unnecessary setbacks and failures.
9. **Praise publicly and punish privately:** People easily appreciate praise, but are often repulsed by criticism. Leadership involves managing people with different characters, egos, emotions, and feelings. It is generally more arduous to manage people who perform poorly. Principled leaders praise their stakeholders (i.e., employees, independent contractors, vendors, and colleagues) in a more overt fashion and criticize them privately in an attempt to improve performance.
10. **Spread the fame in success and take the blame in failure:** Principled leadership is about the "we" and not the "I." It is the collective effort and not just the individual undertaking. It is about leading by example and intelligently confronting daily distractions. The leadership path is strewn with both bouquets and brickbats.
11. **Listen to all and take your call:** According to Rao, values-based leaders gather extensive information in order to render the best decisions. Making decisions involves the initial collection of information, analyzing such gathered data from multiple perspectives, weighing both the pros and cons, and, finally, making a decisive call. Listening to and engaging all ensures the receipt and analysis of more information from multiple perspectives, all of which lead to better quality decision-making with more probability of success.
12. **Walk your talk:** Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and most recently, Nelson Mandela, were all leaders who made a difference; they established precedent by setting an example. People trusted, revered, and followed them because they practiced what they preached. All of these leaders *walked their talk*, capturing the world's attention in the process.
13. **Deal with people differently:** Ken Blanchard emphasized the well-known maxim of "different strokes for different folks" in his book, *One-Minute Manager*. As people have different needs, emanate from various backgrounds, and espouse often divergent desires, there is no quick fix available to properly, equitably, and efficiently manage and direct the actions of others. Leaders must be in a position to acknowledge and understand the aspirations and needs of their stakeholders and must mold themselves to achieve goals without generating unnecessary conflict.
14. **Leaders command respect:** Manipulation does not earn respect. And coercion does not work. Leaders must show genuine warmth and concern to influence others. In today's world, workers strive to partner with their supervisors rather than be treated as employees. They like to be empowered rather than to be dictated to. They respond more favorably to genuine leadership rather than to disingenuous tactics.

- 15. Do not blame circumstances:** People often blame circumstances for their failures. Everyone has challenges, which are mostly the result of external factors. We all have two forces that either enhance or destroy our lives. While internal forces are within our control to manage, external forces are largely beyond human control. People often fail to succeed because of external factors, but become stronger by facing up to external challenges.
- 16. Do not compete, collaborate:** The author asserts that companies reinvent themselves time and again, acclimating to changing business circumstances. In this way, competition can strengthen organizations. But excessive competition can concomitantly drain organizational resources and energies. Today's business world is marked by forging coalitions and engaging in collaboration as much as by competition.
- 17. Do not react, act:** Conflicts are often best resolved when leaders adopt a positive attitude. Leaders who routinely react negatively can sometimes aggravate the problem rather than strive towards a fair and equitable solution.
- 18. Think globally, act locally:** Large companies think and act on a global scale as customers' needs differ from region to region, culture to culture, and country to country. Companies must also customize their services and products to suit local standards. KFC, Nokia, McDonald's, Starbucks, and Whirlpool have successfully followed this strategy.
- 19. Invest in people:** The constitution and composition of a company's workforce usually determine its competitive advantage. Hence, organizations must provide regular training to develop their workers' skills and abilities.
- 20. Everybody is a leader:** All individuals possess the innate ability to lead in a values-based and effective fashion regardless of their respective positions in a society's social/political/economic hierarchy. The essential elements, pursuant to Rao's philosophy, are leading by example, accepting responsibility, and streamlining efforts to make a positive difference – both within the workplace and throughout the world.
- 21. Soft leadership is the heart of leadership:** In *Success Sutras*, Rao coined a new leadership concept: "soft leadership." Globalization, liberalization, privatization, and the rapid growth of technology have redefined the concept of leadership and role of leaders, resulting in the need for company managers to acquire new and specialized sets of skills. Collectively, these are termed *soft leadership*. The author singles out eleven characteristics which he believes distinguish *soft* leaders from others: character, charisma, conscience, conviction, courage, communication, compassion, commitment, consistency, consideration, and contribution.

Lessons Learned

The following what we believe are the most beneficial takeaways from this book:

- Learn lessons from the experiences of great leaders to enhance your own leadership efficacy; and

- Derive and develop these lessons from various sources by reading books, observing others, listening, teaching, training, and acquiring your own experiences.

Our Recommendation

With his admirable record of international leadership — most notably in the areas of teaching, research, and consultancy — Professor M.S.Rao has effectively integrated his rich experiences to construct these leadership maxims for readers to ponder, and hopefully integrate into their business operations. He has undoubtedly explored many research sources to arrive at his conclusions. His prowess in leadership development is artfully and coherently presented in this book. *Success Sutras* is a good resource for learners who want to excel as leaders.

Reference

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About the Reviewers

M. Ganesh Sai has co-authored five books including award-winning *Success Can Be Yours*, *Short Stories to Share*; *Get Inspired*, *Smartness Guide*; *Success Tools for Students*; *Skills for Your Career Success: Touch Your Tipping Point*; and *Soar Like Eagles! Success Tools for Freshers*. He has been listed as one of the leading achievers around the world in *Marquis Who's Who in the World* (2014). His areas of interest include Success, Leadership, Motivation, Career, and Personality Development. He can be reached at mgshyd@gmail.com; via his blog site: <http://mgshyd.wordpress.com>; and/or by accessing <https://www.facebook.com/pages/M-Ganesh-Sai/471536619627802>. Testimonials by acclaimed leaders can be accessed at: <http://speakerpedia.com/speakers/m-ganesh-sai>.

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