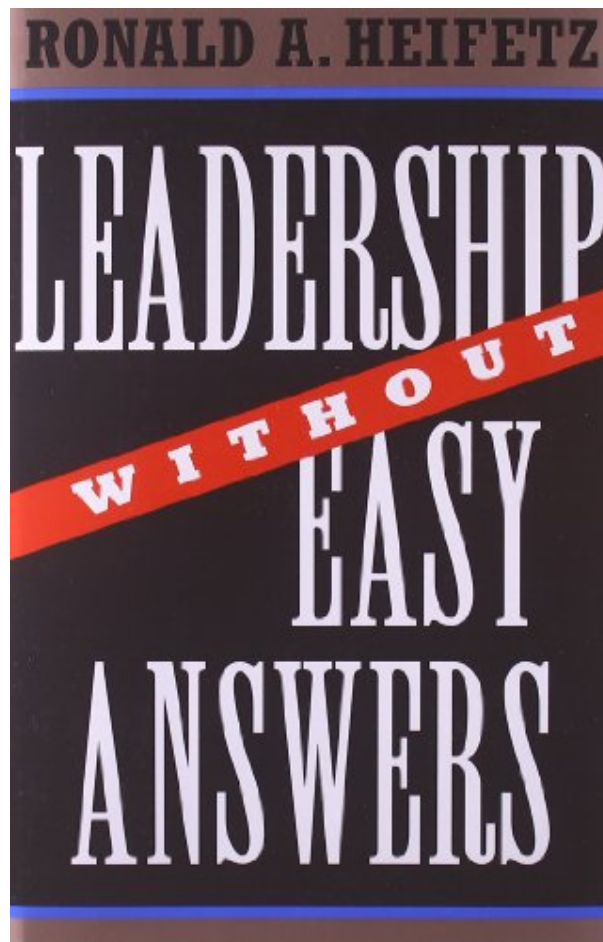
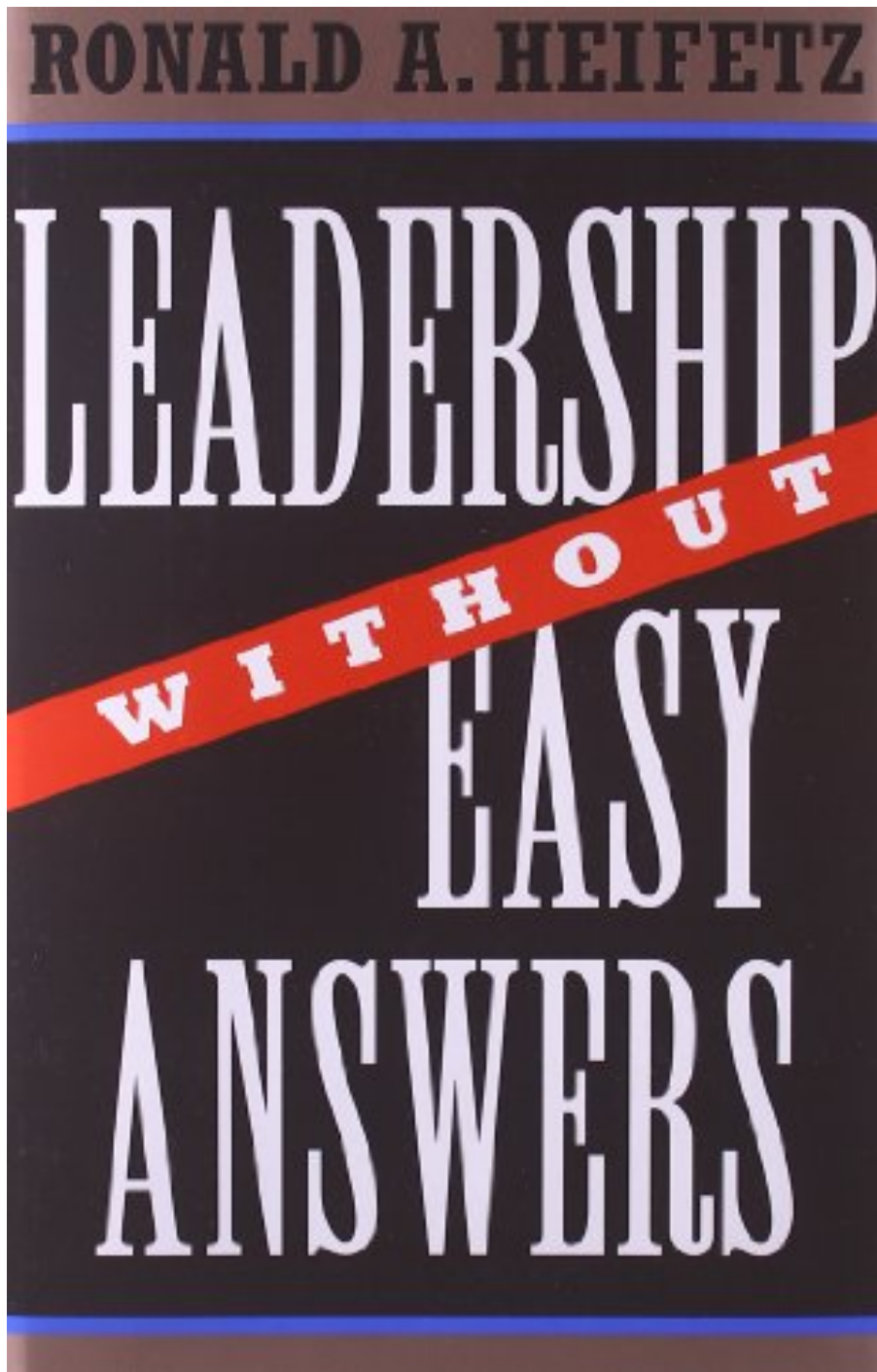


**LEADERSHIP WITHOUT EASY ANSWERS
BY RONALD HEIFETZ**



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Not Just Another LEadership Fad Book

By JB

If you're tired of the quick leadership fad books (10 steps to becoming a great leader, Leadership Lessons of So and So, etc) then this book is for you. We all take it for granted that we know what Leadership is. Heifetz does an excellent job of questioning our traditional assumptions of leadership by making a distinction between leadership and positions of authority. Too often we mistaken positions of authority as being leaders but in reality we all know many people who are leaders who aren't in positions of authority as well as people who are in positions of authority that we would never consider to be leaders.

Authority is conferred power to perform a service - it's an expectation or a series of expectations. In this way, authority can be given and taken away. Heifetz describes two different kinds of authority: formal and

informal. Formal authority is given to a person through a contract, job description, legislation, etc. Informal authority is given or taken away by the community to the person in authority - often its unspoken expectations. You can see this interaction all the time - for instance a teacher has the formal authority to instruct the class but students may not give the teacher the authority (informal) to do that and will not pay attention. Often you have to increase your informal authority in order to exercise your formal authority. In the work place you can see this play out too where a person may have positional authority but the subordinates don't respect that authority.

Heifetz explores leadership with a number of psychology tools. For instance, he makes constant reference to a "holding environment" which has its origins in psychoanalysis. A holding environment consists of any relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of another party and facilitate adaptive work.

This is crucial in Heifetz's view of leadership in that a leader is someone who mobilizes a person or community to confront difficult issues/problems and to determine solutions. Often, people or a community will look to the leader to solve a problem but rarely are clear answers and solutions available. A leader must facilitate the community wrestling with the deeper issues rather than just simply trying to fix everything with simple answers. The issue of violence in schools is an example. While people look to positions of authority to solve the problem through gun control, school safety programs, etc. - those are all technical answers for something that is truly an adaptive problem for the community. It is a challenge to have the community question its own attitudes, actions, behavior, or beliefs.

Heifetz uses the rest of the book to describe adaptive leadership with examples ranging from civil rights to political decisions leading to war. It is an amazing exploration of leadership with Heifetz articulating different aspects of leadership that haven't been described before.

Again, this is not a step by step approach to leadership, but rather taking a step back and asking ourselves just what is leadership, what role does it play in society, what role should it play, and why are people resistant to it at times. From this understanding, you'll be better able to determine your own leadership strategies.

48 of 51 people found the following review helpful.

The best book on leadership theory around...

By Stephen Armstrong

I do not want to repeat what the above Amazon reviewers have already said. Nevertheless, I think Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* is the best book on the modern theory of leadership around.

Heifetz integrates "great man/great woman" (trait) theories of leadership with "great times" (situational) theories, and defines "leadership" as "an activity that fosters adaptive work and addresses the value conflicts that people hold." He distinguishes "technical" problems that may not require leadership (adaptive work) from "adaptive problems" which people experience as threatening to themselves or their group. (The conflict over abortion, for instance, can be seen as an adaptive problem, because it represents a value conflict that provokes work-avoidance--scapegoating, dishonesty, polarizing conversations, etc.)

Heifetz sees leadership as being "practical" and "authentic", and the leader is always working towards using authority (formal and informal) to help members of contesting groups arrive at solutions that promote fundamental values (such as democracy, equality before the law, freedom).

This book is not a "how-to" book and does not promote charismatic leadership (which the author would view as largely work-avoidance and dependency-fostering). Heifetz is an excellent writer and communicates well with both academics and interested citizens.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

It was a textbook for class. I wasn't a ...

By Emily W.

It was a textbook for class. I wasn't a fan of what Heifetz had to say about leadership, but that's a personal issue. The book was well written and laid out appropriately.

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