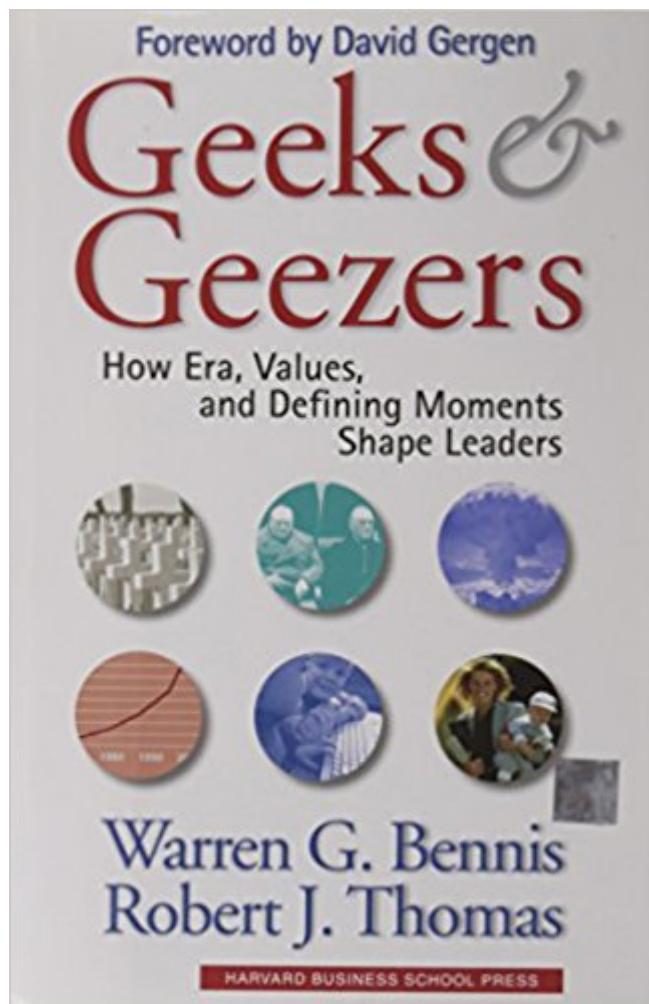


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# Geeks And Geezers



## Synopsis

This work presents a model that predicts who is likely to become, and remain, a leader, and why. It is based on a cross generational study of two groups of leaders: geezers, whose experiences were shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, and geeks, the children of TV and computers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Successful leaders young and old share numerous qualities, say Bennis and Thomas. The authors, who bring considerable experience to the table (Bennis has written over 30 books on leadership and Thomas is a senior fellow with Accenture's Institute for Strategic Change), interviewed more than 40 leaders who they deem either "geeks" (aged 21-34) or "geezers" (aged 70-82) to evaluate the effect of era on values and success. The two groups vary in terms of their ambitions, heroes and family lives, but members of both sets share one common experience: all have "undergone at least one intense, transformational experience," which the authors call a "crucible." In some cases the crucible was an actual hardship, e.g., geezer Sidney Rittenberg spent 16 years in prison in China for speaking out against the government. For others, it was a dramatic experience, such as NYSE pioneer Muriel Siebert's entry into male-dominated Wall Street in 1967 or geek Liz Altman's stint working at a Japanese Sony factory before becoming a Motorola v-p. The authors offer interviews and statistical data as evidence for the value of the crucible experiences. Among the survey results: of the geezers, 87% had mothers who worked at home, while only 7% of the geeks grew up similarly; 8% of the geezers had divorced parents, versus 44% of the geeks, both facts no doubt

reflecting their eras. As an overview, the book lacks the practical applications of some of Bennis's other works, but it's revealing and entertaining nonetheless. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

"This invaluable book identifies the special qualities and experiences that help good managers become great leaders. It should be required reading for every aspiring leader." -Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks "Geeks and Geezers is an insightful and absorbing culling of wisdom from remarkable leaders whose ability to create meaning out of adversity is profoundly inspiring. Read this wonderful book for its useful lessons from those already at the top, but also to get to know the emerging heroes who are shaping our future and changing the very definition of leadership."

-Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Harvard Business School, and best-selling author of *Evolve: Succeeding in the Digital Culture of Tomorrow* "Geeks and Geezers is both Warren Bennis's most important and his most enjoyable book." -Peter F. Drucker, Professor of Social Science and Management, Claremont Graduate University "An inspired idea, a tantalizing title, an essential book." -Howard Gardner, coauthor of *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* "A great book for all ages and all seasons. I was humbled by the stories and inspired by the messages that Bennis and Thomas drew from them." -Charles Handy, social philosopher and author of *The Elephant and the Flea* "As a geezer, I still want to understand leadership better—not just how to lead but also how to follow the best people. This book offers fresh and useful ideas from any reader's perspective." -George P. Shultz, Thomas W. and Susan B. Ford Distinguished Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Geeks & Geezers by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas is about how Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders. And it does an excellent job of pointing out the differences between our generations. This Harvard Business School Press publication is definitely useful in understanding the way folks in my parents' generation (the Geezers) react to those in my children's generation (Geek) . Based on their definitions for Geeks and Geezers, I am in between the two, yet most of my acquaintances put me in the Geek category due to my love of and work in the world of technology. The basic premise of this book is that all leaders must go through a "crucible" of some kind. The kind of leadership characteristics we have may be different because of our environments (Geezers defined by WWII, Parental fallibility, etc. and Geeks by abundance, opportunity, technology and globalization), but every leader is tested somehow. The different environments and experiences affects the needs, wants, character and maturation process for these people and therefore define the differences in leadership style. After exploring historical experiences and

interviewing both groups, the authors complete their leadership model with Era and Individual factors feeding into the crucible of Experiences. The crucible heats up experiences and organization of meaning that develops Leadership competencies. The crucible might be military service in the case of the Geezer or business failure in the case of the Geeks, but whatever that life changing crucible is, it is the one thing that is common to leadership. This book is worth your time and consideration if for no other reason than to understand the value of the crucible we may now be going through in our contracting economy - this so called job-loss recovery.

Served its purpose for a class. The book was actually interesting.

I enjoyed the comparison of geeks and geezers and I think I fit more in the middle to "geeky" side due to my age. I thought the book was solid and it was a quick read because it was so interesting. I'm not sure how much of the info can be used to help you improve your leadership skills but one of it's main points about adaptability was worth the price of the book. In summary, well worth your time to study this book.

I am enjoying this book I am not yet through But I will recommend this to my friend after finishing it. infact I bought three hard copies and gave one to my Bishop. It is so inspiring.Thank You

While I didn't find the concepts of this book to be earth shattering, I did find the contrast in cultures and goals people set between people coming in their own during my generation ( late 90's to early 00's and that of my father (late 40's and early 50's). I would recommend this book to leaders leading multigenerational teams or to anyone that enjoys social studies.

Great guidance. This is a real challenge in the workplace. Every business owner with a cross section of employees should read this book.

I have been in search for finding answers to the questions like:How can we learn to lead?How we sustain our passion for leading so as to lead for a life time?The book "Geeks and Geezers" that I read recently has partly attempted to supply some of the answers, and I intend to share these in this post . All of us experience the periods of testing, turning points, defining events or intense experiences which force us to ask ourselves who we are and what we are capable of .Warren Bennis and Robert J. Thomas call these experiences "crucibles of leadership" in chapter 4 of their

book "Geeks and Geezers - How Era, Values and defining Moments Shape Leaders". Some examples of crucibles are failures , imprisonment , death, humiliation. Crucible is a metaphor for the circumstances that cause an individual to be utterly transformed.Crucibles provide us with the frameworks for self introspection and force us to answer the questions:Who am I?Who could I be?Who should I be?How should I relate to the world outside myself?But crucibles exist in real time, everywhere and all the time-"Boring meetings , Unspoken grievances.Closed doors.Unexplained actions.Unemployed talents.Subtle rejections.The "little murders" that deplete energy and lower self esteem.Belief systems that require questioning, dozing like sacred cows."These unnoticed crucibles are the most potent and useful opportunities for learning to lead.Do you recollect your own crucible moments, how they changed you , how they helped you to find your voice and create your own story?Warren Bennis is Professor and Founding Chairman of The Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California.Robert J. Thomas is Associate Partner and Senior Fellow with the Accenture Institute for Strategy Change.The two authors have written this interesting and revealing book of 215 pages, after interviewing a group of 43 leaders from 21 years to 93 years old.I must confess that reading about crucibles , I remembered Viktor E. Frankl's book"Man's Search for Meaning".How Frankl escaped the death narrowly in concentration camps of Auschwitz, and emerged out stronger as a world renowned author and leader."According to a survey conducted by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress, Man's Search For Meaning belongs to a list of "the ten most influential books in the United States." (New York Times, November 20, 1991). At the time of the author's death in 1997, the book had sold 10 million copies in twenty-four languages"(Wikipedia).The question is how , when faced with extreme challenges and crucibles , some people become leaders while others give way and pass into nothingness ?Leaders have four essential skills , competencies or qualities .1.Adaptive capacity.We must develop the capacity to adapt to change .We must not be inflexible in our conventions and habits"Beware of the prisons you build to protect yourself". John Gardner.Adaptive capacity has five parts:Hardiness,First-class noticer,Learning learning,proactively seizing opportunities, creativity.2.The ability to engage others in shared meaning.This has three parts:Encourage dissent , Empathy , Obsessive communication.3.A distinctive and compelling voice.It has four parts:Purpose,self awareness,self confidence,Emotional quotient.4.Integrity. Integrity is composed of three elementsAmbition ( desire to achieve something, whether for personal gain or the good of the community or both),Competence,Moral Compass.The authors call these three elements "The Integrity Tripod".It is intriguing why authors introduced the concept of crucible and essential leadership qualities only for leaders below35 years(Geeks) and above 70 years(Geezers) .I think , it is equally applicable to

leaders in the age group between 35 years to 70 years .The authors say:"We believe that we have identified the process that allows an individual to undergo testing and to emerge, not just stronger, but better equipped with the tools he or she needs both to lead and to learn.It is a model that explains how individuals make meaning out of difficult events- we call them crucibles- and show that process of 'meaning making' both galvanises individuals and gives them their distinctive voice."The process of becoming leaders involves learning to identify such crucibles and to leap in.It also involves developing the four essential qualities of leadership . If we want to continue leading , learning and feeling well ,we need to develop the quality of neoteny. "The dictionary defines neoteny, a zoological term, as "the retention of youthful qualities by adults." Neoteny is more than retaining a youthful appearance, although that is often part of it. Neoteny is the retention of all those wonderful qualities that we associate with youth: curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearlessness, warmth, energy. Unlike those defeated by time and age, our geezers have remained much like our geeks--open, willing to take risks, hungry for knowledge and experience, courageous, eager to see what the new day brings. Time and loss steal the zest from the unlucky, and leave them looking longingly at the past. Neoteny is a metaphor for the quality--the gift--that keeps the fortunate of whatever age focused on all the marvelous undiscovered things to come."Further, the ability to continue learning and learning how to learn is an essential skill of leadership for life.Lastly , we need to provide potential leaders with opportunities to learn and practice their craft.

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