

# Review of Eye of the Storm Leadership

## by John Sautelle

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John Sautelle, Director of Performgroup and LEADR  
Advanced mediator reviews Peter Adler's new publication.

If you want a thought-provoking, engaging and at times inspirational read then this is the book for you!

Apart from conflict resolution much of my professional time these days is spent working with private and public sector organisations developing leadership skills, so the title to Peter's latest book immediately caught my eye. As it turns out, this book is not about leadership generally – it focuses specifically on leadership in the context of conflict. Whilst the content is directly relevant to anyone who works in conflict resolution, I think it is clear Peter did not have mediators alone in mind when he put pen to paper.

In the preface to the book Peter sets the scene for what follows – a direct challenge to us as mediators to expand our thinking. In his words:

*“Mediators like to talk about ‘the field’ and ‘the profession’. Actually, much as we hunger to be taken seriously, we are neither. Mediation is a passion, a calling shared by many more people in the world than those who have the word ‘Mediator’ engraved on their business cards. This far larger group of people have never been formally trained and don’t know what we are talking about when we slip into mediator-speak. Nonetheless they share the same emotional and intellectual impulses we have about the need to find agreement on important matters, the power of good negotiating processes, the inclusion of diverse voices, and the ability of ordinary people to forge their own solutions. ....It is not more formally trained*

*‘mediators’ we need but rather a new generation of people who can make the obvious links between mediation and leadership without all the preoccupying yearnings for professionalization. This book tries to take up that challenge. .... My highest hope is that some of the 150 ideas described here will find their way into the working lives of thought leaders who share the same quiet aspiration we have for making the world a little better place than we found it.”*

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I found the structure of the book interesting and very impactful. There are 15 chapters with evocative headings like “Guerilla Bridge Building”, “The Protean Way”, “Hatching Plans” and “Choreography”. Each chapter follows a set format comprising a powerful introductory metaphor, short pithy ideas - one to a page and each

laced with short vignettes and an accompanying image. At the end of each Chapter there are some challenging exercises designed to connect the ideas and principles with conflict in the reader's world. Drawing on extensive experience and deep wisdom, Peter paints with brushes of all sizes on a broad and rich historical, scientific and cultural canvas.

This is well illustrated in the opening paragraph of Chapter III, "Into the Fray":

*"Starting Point / The Mugwump Connection*

*The impulse to manage conflict constructively goes back 40,000 years and spans 4,000 cultures and language groups. It runs parallel to our deepest destructive impulses. Across time and distance, biological necessity and social ingenuity have created artful political interventions in conflicts, among them, Hawaiian Ho'oponopono, the Leopard Chief practices of central Africa, the Rabbinic interventions of Central Europe, Afghanistan's Loya Jirga procedures, the disentangling ceremonies of Melanesia, the peace pipe rituals of Native Americans, the Yoriai tradition of Japan, and the song contests of certain Eskimo peoples."*

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If you want to know the connection between the above, the notion of a person who acts independently in political conflict and the term "mugwump" you will have to get hold of

the book and read the rest of the chapter!

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It is not a straightforward step by step guide. It is paradoxically intuitive in a practical sort of way.

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Lest you think the book is only about grand, sweeping ideas, let me assure you the book is peppered with practical suggestions. For example, in the chapter titled "Attacking Stubborn Problems" (Chapt VI) there is a "Contradictions" section dealing with conflicts over problem-defining or solution-seeking. Peter comments that the more intense the conflict, the more binary people become in their intellectual and emotional responses. He suggests that the dilemmas people experience are situations which offer two solutions, neither of which is acceptable and both which together defy logic.

His advice:

*"So your work must employ paradoxical injunctions. To go fast, go slow. To get started, begin at the end. To get straight to the heart of things, take multiple passes. To move forward, go backward. The answer to a paradox is not one or the other, this one or that one, 'either' or 'or'. It is incorporating both and all into a better pathway."*

I think this passage illustrates well Peter's approach throughout the book. It is not a straightforward step by step guide. It is paradoxically intuitive in a practical sort of way.

Whilst this works well for me, I imagine it could be frustrating if you are seeking specific skills and tools and prefer the "nuts and bolts" approach. Whilst on the topic of possible frustrations, let me also warn you that a significant amount,

but by no means all, of the content relates to political and social conflict. If that is not your cup of tea all will not be lost as the book has been designed to allow the reader to dip in and out of chapters.

I believe the Chapter on “Creating and Managing Process” will appeal to many mediators. In the section on “Respect” Peter touches on the importance of carefully designing the beginning of a process in a way that modulates expectations to match context.

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“Lower expectations if people anticipate too much. Raise them if they are feeling hopeless.” Simple, wise, pragmatic advice. He concludes the Chapter with a brief exposition titled “Failure” which reminded me of a sometimes personal blind-spot – namely a tendency to brush over the need to ensure the parties explore fully what will happen if agreements reached subsequently break down. There is an art to navigating waters of future failure without sinking the

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## John Sautelle

John Sautelle is a Principal of PerformGroup. He is a highly skilled mediator, presenter, facilitator and trainer. John brings to his clients a deep understanding of their needs and the challenges they face in today’s rapidly changing world.

Before moving into consulting and training, John was a lawyer in private practice for more than 20 years with many private, corporate and government clients.

John believes in a workplace where individuals have a strong sense of purpose and meaning – a place where they can learn and grow and make a positive contribution. His passion is helping leaders, individuals and organisations achieve that type of workplace.

positive feelings generated by agreement.

Peter reminds us of the need to embed defaults into the agreements. In his words:

*“Set up specific mechanisms by which everyone knows what to do if things unravel. Make the plan exact and everyone’s comprehension of it precise: who will contact whom, the timing and manner of communication up political chains, the use of friendly others to help reconvene and broker further fence-mending.”*

It is difficult, in such a short space, to do justice to this book. Whilst digesting it I was aware that each Chapter had an immediate impact of some sort. I suspect that is just the beginning. I highly recommend you get hold of a copy.

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Eye of the Storm Leadership is available online or as a CD or DVD. For more information or to order [www.eyeofthestormleadership.com](http://www.eyeofthestormleadership.com)

[Read Chapter V, Practical politics >>](#)

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