From Smart to Wise: Acting and Leading with Wisdom

A new book distills practical wisdom for addressing 21st-century business challenges into six key leadership capabilities.

CEO coach and advisor Prasad Kaipa and strategy consultant Navi Radjou have been studying the concept of wise leadership since 1989. Having worked with hundreds of executives in global Fortune 500 companies and entrepreneurial ventures, they have developed a unique way to assess leadership skills and help leaders to be effective, innovative, and successful.

Based on their research, experience, and insights, these internationally admired thought leaders have written a new book that presents stories of well-known wise leaders, an integrated self-development framework, and step-by-step strategies and tools leaders can use to ignite genius within themselves, their teams, and their organizations.

In From Smart to Wise: Acting and Leading with Wisdom (Jossey-Bass, 2013), Kaipa and Radjou present a compelling argument for why intelligence, or smartness, alone won’t be sufficient to deal effectively with the escalating complexity of the 21st century. Rather, what leaders need is practical wisdom—a set of new capabilities that enable them to see the potential benefit in complexity, and to turn it into an opportunity to bring new value to their organizations.

Kaipa and Radjou show why being smart, while exhilarating, can prevent leaders from paying sufficient attention to qualities like prudence, humility, ethics, and the common good.

They identify two broad styles that characterize smart leaders—functional smart and business smart. Functional smart leaders generally excel in one field or function, such as R&D or operations; effective execution, not risk taking, is their forte. Business smart leaders are big picture thinkers, visionaries, and risk takers with a competitive drive. Both styles of smart leadership have great strengths and serious limitations.

The smart leader who evolves into a wise leader, however, is able to discern which kind of smartness is appropriate for a particular situation, and to focus on business specifics and what’s personally beneficial, while simultaneously paying attention to intangibles such as shared values, ethics, and the greater good.

Using real-life stories of leaders who have struggled or excelled in their roles, the authors illustrate how six wise leadership capabilities can be cultivated and applied.

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The strategies, insights, and advice in this book enable smart leaders to cultivate wise leadership by learning how to:

- **Shift one’s perspective and connect to a noble purpose.** Start thinking holistically and focus on a higher purpose rather than purely on execution or strategy.
- **Act authentically and appropriately.** Become fully engaged in the process, yet emotionally detached from the outcome.
- **Lead from any position.** Learn when to lead from the front and when to let others lead and take credit.
- **Decide with discernment.** Make decisions that are intuitive, ethical, yet pragmatic.
- **Demonstrate flexible fortitude.** Know when to hold on and when to let go if the situation calls for it and is aligned with the larger purpose.
- **Cultivate enlightened self-interest.** Be motivated to create value and bring benefit to the greatest number of people.

The book includes a self-assessment that enables readers to measure their leadership effectiveness across six key capabilities so they know where to focus self-development efforts. For each of the six leadership capabilities, there are practical question guides, exercises, and other strategies to help leaders delve into, understand, and cultivate new skills.

If smartness was the currency of success in 20th century, wisdom will be the currency of success in the 21st century. Wisdom is grounded in ethics, shared values, and in serving a larger purpose—all of which are important qualities in today’s complex, interdependent world. Wise leadership leverages smartness for the greater good; this is achieved by balancing action with reflection and introspection.

*From Smart to Wise* shows us how we can achieve greater success and feel more fulfilled by thinking and acting as a wise leader.
**About the Authors**

**Prasad Kaipa PhD** is an internationally renowned thought leader in the field of leadership development, a CEO coach and advisor, and lead author of *From Smart to Wise: Acting and Leading with Wisdom* (Jossey-Bass, 2013).

For more than a decade, Kaipa has worked with over 120 C-suite executives in Fortune 500 companies around the world in the areas of innovation and leadership development. Some of his clients include HP, CISCO, Disney, Adobe, Apple, Xerox, Boeing, Mastek, BAE Systems, and Navteq. He cofounded the TiE Institute in Silicon Valley in 2002 to assist entrepreneurs in developing effective management teams, communication skills, and leadership perspective.

Kaipa’s research on wise leadership started when he was a research fellow at Apple University in 1989. A senior research fellow and founding executive director of the Centre for Leadership, Innovation, and Change at the Indian School of Business (ISB), he has taught executive education programs through ISB, INSEAD, the London Business School, and the Tuck School of Business. He was the Richardson Visiting Fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership between 2010 and 2011, and is currently a visiting faculty at the Indian School of Business and part-time faculty at the Saybrook Graduate School.

He has served on the boards of the International Leadership Association, Society for Organizational Learning, Marico Innovation Foundation, Samskrita Bharati, Integral Leadership Review, and Hindu University of North America.


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Many leaders are discovering that smartness alone is insufficient to achieve both success and a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. More smartness is increasingly failing to bring meaningful growth and prosperity to organizations and their leaders.

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Navi Radjou is an innovation thought leader, a leadership and strategy consultant, and the coauthor of From Smart to Wise: Acting and Leading with Wisdom (Jossey-Bass, 2013).

Based in Palo Alto, CA, Radjou has consulted with global Fortune 1000 companies, including Ernst & Young, General Motors, IBM, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, SAP, and Tata Consultancy Services, on innovation and leadership strategies.

Radjou is a Fellow at Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, and a World Economic Forum (WEF) faculty member. He is also a member of WEF’s Global Agenda Council on Design Innovation.

Most recently, he served as executive director of the Centre for India & Global Business at Cambridge Judge Business School. Previously, he was a longtime vice president and analyst at Forrester Research in Boston and San Francisco, advising senior executives worldwide on breakthrough growth strategies.

A popular columnist at HBR.org, Radjou coauthored the acclaimed Jugaad Innovation: Think Frugal, Be Flexible, Generate Breakthrough Growth, which The Economist calls “the most comprehensive book yet to appear on the subject” of frugal innovation.


A sought-after keynote speaker, Radjou has spoken at the World Economic Forum, Council on Foreign Relations, the Conference Board, and Asia Society, among others.

An Indian-born French national, Radjou earned a postgraduate degree from École Centrale Paris and attended the Yale School of Management. He is a lifelong student of Eastern spiritual practices such as yoga, Ayurveda, and Buddhist meditation. Learn more about him at NaviRadjou.com.

“With examples from today’s best leaders, Kaipa and Radjou have created a practical guide for accelerating your own wise leadership development, a true competitive advantage in today’s rapidly changing world. We can all benefit from the self-reflection that From Smart to Wise encourages. By defining our unique ‘noble purpose,’ we can bring about meaningful change and progress in our companies, communities, and society.”

—Indra K. Nooyi, chairman and CEO, PepsiCo, Inc.
The Six Key Leadership Capabilities—and How Smart vs. Wise Leaders Express Them

Smartness is like a wild horse—riding it can be exhilarating for a while until one is thrown from it. To tame and harness smartness for the long run, we need wisdom—the stuff that gives us ethical clarity and a sense of purpose.

Below are six capabilities that smart 21st-century business leaders can use to cultivate wise leadership. Smart leaders generally fall into two broad categories: functional smart and business smart.

1. Perspective

*Functional smart leaders*...typically focus on what can be done in the short term and tend to shy away from ideas that don’t reinforce their own perspective.

*Business smart leaders*...typically have a long-term vision and can get others to line up behind that vision. They spot opportunities and act quickly on them, sometimes ignoring critical input.

*Wise leaders*...pay attention to patterns that connect and ideas that expand their worldview. They focus on bringing out the best in others and finding a noble purpose that can be shared with their followers.

2. Action Orientation

*Functional smart leaders*...are more focused on doing things “the right way” than on doing “what is right.” They don’t adapt easily to changing circumstances.

*Business smart leaders*...tend to act impulsively and make emotional decisions but do not always communicate their course corrections or reasoning to others.

*Wise leaders*...are neither excessively cautious nor risky. They use their noble purpose as a touchstone to assess which risks are worth taking, and they act appropriately without losing their authenticity.

3. Role Clarity

*Functional smart leaders*...focus on the “what” and “how” of their role rather than the “why.” They also tend to stick to the same role because it’s in their comfort zone.

*Business smart leaders*...often let their ego and pride get attached to their role and the perks that come with it. This can get them into trouble when they feel the end justifies the means.

*Wise leaders*...have no role confusion between what needs to get done and who is best at carrying out that role. They act as trustees or servant leaders in whatever roles they accept—and don’t mind allowing others to lead.

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4. Decision Logic

Functional smart leaders... excel at low-risk decisions that can be executed in a predictable manner. They struggle with decisions that affect the long term or the need to integrate other perspectives.

Business smart leaders... favor decisions that carry high risk and high reward. They are prone to making quick decisions without always consulting others.

Wise leaders... tend to make intuitive decisions using both discernment and discrimination. They make decisions that take into account the larger context, personal values, and ethics.

5. Flexible Fortitude

Functional smart leaders... are methodical in their work and operate strictly within those limits. They will defend their decision at any cost, and it’s difficult for them to change directions.

Business smart leaders... also demonstrate persistence, but can too easily give up if there’s a better opportunity. They bounce back from setbacks, but don’t always learn from their mistakes.

Wise leaders... stick to decisions when aligned with their noble purpose, are good at enlisting support, and revise decisions when the context shifts. They draw on collective willpower for transformational change.

6. Drivers of Motivation

Functional smart leaders... are motivated by operational excellence and high-quality execution. They place taking care of their families and financial security over fame or financial gains.

Business smart leaders... are driven by the strong desire to achieve fame and success in life. Adventurous by nature, they eschew routine projects and seek challenging initiatives instead.

Wise leaders... are driven to serve others. Intrinsically motivated, they can exercise great self-discipline in staying with an issue and resolving it without the need for external reward or recognition.

Bridging the Courage Gap

The courage gap is the one that most leaders pay the least attention to, and yet when it is bridged, it can yield the biggest payoff. Self-deception or lack of self-awareness generally prevent leaders from discovering their deeper desires and intentions. To find the courage to follow your authentic self, consider these questions:

- What have I given up for my current job?
- Have I been ignoring my passions just to make money?
- How do I find the courage to follow my dreams?
- Am I supporting others to pursue their own passions?