

Foreword to *Disruption Leadership Matters : Lessons for Leaders from the Pandemic* by Gary Ryan

I've journeyed with Gary Ryan for more than 11 years now, sharing our thoughts and insights on leadership and the challenges and excitement of our work. There's something quite empowering about travelling with someone whose ideas and insights spark off something within you that develops and enhances your learning. Such has been my experience with Gary.

In our leadership development work, our workshops, coaching and mentoring of leaders, we've both talked about "disruption" for many years. However, neither of us had contemplated the enormous impact that the COVID disruption would have on our world, our country, our organisations, and our professional and personal lives. Nor were we ready for the suddenness upon which it descended, not to mention its intransigence about leaving!

Back in early 2020, as it became evident that this "virus" was taking hold and beginning to disrupt our lives in an unprecedented way, Gary and I began to have long Zoom calls about how we could support the leaders who looked to us for inspiration and motivation. Some of those we had worked with were pivoting rapidly, refocusing their leadership style and recreating their organisations as a result. Other leaders were very challenged, unable to see a way through, watching COVID not only disrupt what they had created but also make it seemingly irrelevant. Those leaders struggled with knowing how to lead their people through this unpredictable time, fearing for the future of their organisation.

Many of our leadership development programs and workshops were cancelled or postponed as lockdowns came into force. Our coaching and mentoring continued, but only the proactive leaders recognised that more than at any other time, this was a financial investment they needed to make in their leadership development right now if they were to lead and support their people through this pandemic. Our concern was for the others who could not see a way through. It became apparent that it was time to write a book, and we had time to do it, and Gary has led the way.

Gary is a highly experienced leadership development coach and workshop facilitator. He is regularly contracted to present his business and leadership development programs within university departments. He has worked with CEOs and senior leaders not only here in Australia but globally. While academically highly educated in his field and therefore theoretically grounded, he is sought after by organisations because his leadership development programs are very practical. He is known for his ability to provide the psychological safety leaders need to talk about the actual day to day challenges they face. He then can provide strategies, insights and skill development to assist those leaders in meeting those challenges when they return to the office. He meets people where they are and tailors his work to the specific needs of each leader and the organisation.

As Gary says, *Disruption Leadership Matters – Lessons for Leaders from the Pandemic* is a book about “leadership-in-action”. It challenges leaders to refocus their leadership thinking. In many cases, they unlearn the way they did leadership for years before this pandemic and relearn new ways to develop and enhance their leadership style to meet this new normal.

For Gary, this is about leaders putting people first and enabling them to be the best they can be for themselves and the organisation. The leaders who quickly pivoted as covid-19 descended were those who recognised at the outset that they didn’t have all the answers. They didn’t know what to do, so they led from the centre, not from the top, and brought their people into a collaborative process of problem-solving, critical reflection and decision making, and they listened and learned. The result was a pooling of diverse talent, experience, expertise, and wisdom that saw them move to new ways of working with their people. As a result, they were 150% engaged in the process, while other leaders and organisations are stuck floundering, restricted by their pre-pandemic thinking. Therefore, his message to leaders in this book is that if they want to move confidently and proactively into a new future, they need to engage their people and lead differently.

His eight chapters show how leaders can do that. It’s a book to be studied either alone or with your team. It shows you a road through, and if you find great value in Gary’s insights, you will find yourself thinking: “If I have gained this much from his book, how much more might I gain by working with him.”

Disruption will be a constant presence in the lives of leaders into the foreseeable future. There will be no going back to the way things used to be, to lead the way they did before. While this book is about leading through this current pandemic, its message will empower leaders with the skills and mindsets they need to navigate the next disruption and the one after that, as unpredictability and uncertainty become the new normal.

Gary’s book has the potential to be your road map through to this new normal. I highly recommend you read it.

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