



Lifecircle Leadership Book Discussion Guide

One of the joys of reading a book with a group is that you have the opportunity to discuss themes in the book with friends. You might discover something you skimmed over or inspire someone else with one of your takeaways. Whether you're in an official book club or just plan to read the book with a few friends, get started with these discussion questions.

1. Dr. Townsend doesn't specifically define the phrase "*Lifecircle Leadership*," used in the title and throughout the book. What do you think Lifecircle Leadership means? How does the book's title encapsulate Dr. Townsend's philosophy as demonstrated throughout the book?
2. A publication that heavily influenced Dr. Townsend's doctoral work—and her subsequent decision to publish this book—was Paul Robert's book *The Impulse Society*. Do you believe we are a society driven by impulsive decisions? What are your thoughts on the ramifications this has for all of us, both at home and at work?
3. Do you agree with Dr. Townsend's assertion that the negative effect of contagions from being an "impulse society" affects all employees, no matter their level? (Introduction, pp. 4-5) Why or why not?
4. Does Dr. Townsend make an effective case that empathy—and the lack of it, in some cases—can present an economic cost to businesses? (Introduction, p. 7)
5. In Chapter 4, Dr. Townsend describes some work behaviors that have become all too common, such as skipping meals or sleep—often as a means to signal dedication. Have you ever done this? Or, have you seen others engage in this behavior? Why do you think that this behavior is often rewarded by employers, even if it ultimately is destructive and leads to worse performance?
6. Is "pragmatic altruism" scalable in a business, do you think? Are there industries that could be more or less affected by incorporating pragmatic altruism into their business operations, or is this concept easily applied to all businesses, no matter their size or industry?
7. Consider some of your earlier bosses. (Chapter 6, pp. 45-46.) What were their leadership styles? Which do you think gets the best out of you as an employee? What do you think your personal leadership style is, or most closely matches?
8. In Chapter 7, Dr. Townsend emphasizes the power and importance of listening. She also describes challenges in getting people to believe she seriously wanted to hear what they had to say. Do you find this to be an issue in your line of work? What areas in your company are often overlooked from the position of being asked for input? What could you do to change this dynamic—and what do you think would be the outcome?
9. "A Tale of Two Americas" (Chapter 8) describes on a micro level issues that are being discussed in a much broader context on the national stage. How do you think this will affect how we do business in the future in this country?
10. Chapter 10 describes the impact of community on the work that Dr. Townsend is doing at Loretto. Are the issues she is discussing similar to ones in your own community? Can you relate to the challenges described, or are these issues removed from where you are?
11. Dr. Townsend makes a point to clarify that the programs she is working with are not charitable programs. Why do you think she feels it is important to make this distinction?
12. In Chapter 12, Dr. Townsend relates the story of "Linda." Seemingly small and simple factors can present significant obstacles that can snowball into insurmountable problems. Have you encountered situations such as "Linda's" at your own workplace? Does Dr. Townsend effectively make the case that the personal obstacles of employees present a business challenge to the bottom line?
13. Dr. Townsend describes another personal story in Chapter 16. Why do you think this story is included at the end of the book, and not earlier—or at the beginning?
14. Do you believe that the book makes a strong case for implementing Lifecircle Leadership and pragmatic altruism? How could pragmatic altruism be deployed in your line of work or at your company? What do you think the results would be?