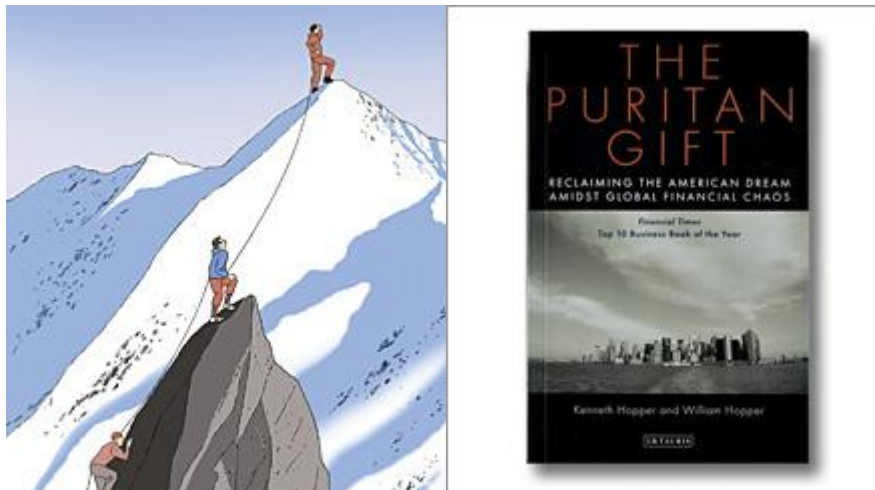


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## Best Business Book 2009: Leadership

### Means to a Greater End

by Charles Handy



Kenneth Hopper and William Hopper

### [\*\*The Puritan Gift: Reclaiming the American Dream amidst Global Financial Chaos\*\*](#)

(revised ed., I.B. Tauris, 2009)

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If ever there was a time when leadership was badly needed and sorely tested, it was during the 12 months after October 2008. The financial crash that almost became a catastrophe was a self-inflicted wound. It did not need to happen. There were warnings enough from concerned observers of troubles ahead, but those in positions of power in leading organizations paid no heed until it was too late. Too many leaders, ensconced in their tall towers, insulated themselves from the world they were supposed to be serving and forgot what they were about.

#### **Lesson from Our Forefathers**

**The best reminder of our underlying purpose comes from a book by brothers Kenneth and William Hopper — Kenneth, an engineer in business in the U.S.; William, an investment banker in London.** *The Puritan Gift: Reclaiming the American Dream amidst Global Financial Chaos* may have escaped notice when first published in 2007 because of its unusual title, but this year's paperback with a new preface by that wise man Russell Ackoff deserves rediscovery at this critical time. "Puritan gift" refers to what the authors describe as the United States' superb managerial culture as established by the descendants of the country's early settlers. Those settlers sought to create God's kingdom on earth in New England in the 17th century. As businessmen they also needed to earn a return

on capital but saw no conflict between the two. Profit to them was the means to a greater end.

The Puritan gift, therefore, is that rare ability to create and manage organizations that serve a useful purpose in society. As the authors note, it later inspired the creation of a federal political culture that enabled 13 obscure colonies at the edge of the civilized world to transform themselves, with the passage of time, into a great power. This managerial culture was even successfully transplanted to Japan under the U.S. occupation after World War II and turned a poor country lacking natural resources into the second-richest in the world.

It was, the Hoppers suggest, the United States' gift to the world until sometime around 1970, when profit-and-loss accounting began to take priority, a time they describe as "the years that the locust ate." It was then that the cult of the expert and the rise of the so-called professional manager shifted the focus of management to money as the measure that mattered, for self and organization. The elevation of shareholder value as the main criterion of business success mistook the means for the ends, a classic category error for logicians, but a calamitous strategic mistake for leaders. This error was compounded when managerial reward was tied to share value.

***The Puritan Gift, this year's best leadership book***, is partly a history of American business, but it is also a lament for the decline of the collegial style of leadership that drove what the authors call the "great engines of growth and prosperity" and that was replaced by the "imperial" rule of the professional CEO in so many companies. It is a reminder of what made the U.S. great and a heartfelt plea for its recall.

<http://www.strategy-business.com/article/09407b?gko=98828-27802017-29169311&cid=enews20091124>