

# Simon Walker : The Undefended Leader trilogy

## 1: Leading out of who you are : Discovering the secret of undefended leadership

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### Preface

You can take a trip to visit Dunn's falls in Jamaica – and they package it for you. No one leaves the prescribed path, everyone stops for a photo at the same place. And yet there is no rule saying you can't stop to take it in, or swim, or enjoy the moment. 'What happens to visitors at Dunn's falls is what happens to everyone everywhere. People allow themselves to be constrained by imagined rules they have come to believe are real: rules that determine their lives and experiences.' Px. It's the kind of leadership people follow – unrewarding, denying sensation, experience, pleasure – just toiling up the side of a waterfall . There is a different way.

### 1. What makes an undefended leader?

Leadership is about who you are, not what you know or what skills you have – it's about trust and it's about power. Leaders are formed, not simply appointed – Mandela, Moses, Churchill. The formation includes putting character to the test – a time when the combatants wrestle with their inner selves, battle against the demons of anger, thirst for power. The public battles are simply a re-enactment of battles already won within. Their moral courage and conviction, personal freedom and security, willingness to embrace personal loss, are available to them only because they have already fought and won the war with themselves. They have nothing to win or lose on the political front that they have not already won or lost on the personal front. They are free of the need to dominate, conquer, oppress, consume, acquire – because they are free within themselves.

The greatest challenge facing Western leaders is not the development of democracy in countries currently governed by other structures of power, but the reformation of our own democracy, which now looks more like market economics than a political system – govts research then provide what consumers want, in order to secure their votes; and focus on short term gain not long term necessity. Only when individual leaders start to make different choices can the big questions be addressed. This book considers the mechanisms of power and asks how someone can become an undefended leader.

## PART 1 : HOW LEADERS DEFEND THEMSELVES

### 2. The hostile world of the leader

How do leaders become defended? They experience three things: idealization, idealism and unmet emotional needs. Idealization – we all live with doubt, confusion, self loathing to some extent; we bury these things and look for someone else through whom to live a surrogate life. The leader. The hero. We need them to be everything we struggle to be. Idealism – most leaders are idealists, want things to be different, better; they live with a discrepancy between the world they want and the world they see. This produces strain, frustration, disappointment – which we often deal with by denial and repression. Leaders can't do that; so end up trying to get people to see things they would prefer not to see. Produces isolation and loneliness.

Unmet emotional needs. Leaders care about others and respond to their needs, sacrificing their own – but then they discover that by doing this they receive approval and appreciation, which compensates for their own unmet needs. So a cycle is established – the leader does not meet his own needs directly, but rather through his service to others, who then reward him with approval. This is clearly unhealthy.

### 3. Strategies of defence I: front and back stage

The leader is on stage, performing; then withdraws to the back stage exhausted. Goffman suggests we all live like this – an outward performance designed to elicit a favourable response. We keep the rest backstage – our discouragement,

fatigue, ambition. The backstage becomes the repository for all we cannot make visible. In extremes it means the leader lives two lives. The backstage needs to be healthy, with appropriate strategies for dealing with unmet needs and unresolved problems – eg retreat time, physical exercise, confidential relationships; otherwise it easily becomes depression, abuse, pornography. The more attention we pay to one of our stages, the less to the other – so some busy leaders need a PA to do their shopping, plan their holidays, buy presents for their family.

The two stages can't be kept completely separate – what goes on in one will always to some extent leak onto the other. This is particularly so for social and spiritual leaders and those in caring professions – their own unmet emotional needs, pushed backstage, generate resentment, envy, pride, anger or even rage – and these things begin to leak frontstage. The leader becomes emotionally full, and loses the capacity to deal with other people's needs because they are so lacking in their own. Explosion is often the result, over some minor thing; little events trigger an explosion of unresolved emotion long contained – which is always destructive for those around.

Example – 'Philip', a Baptist pastor, years of arresting orthodox teaching, and then running off with another man. He must have experienced massive discrepancy between his front stage performance and his backstage reality for years – and his audience kept him there – we asked him to stand on the pedestal, it suited us to have him there.

What leads to the creation of a front and back stage is the feeling that we can't entirely trust our audience, so we need to manage what they see of us.

#### **4. Strategies of defence II: Power**

People have different kinds of power.

1. Personality power – people who influence the emotional state of their audience, through empathy, tuning into others' emotional states, striking chords, using emotional signalling, body language.
2. Resource power – ability to affect the success/failure of an operation because you have control over the resources it needs.
3. Experience power – acquired by being in a situation for a long time; we tried that...
4. Expert power – having greater expertise than your colleagues.
5. Positional power – having a position of authority. Power is a commodity; you possess it, you can accumulate it. It can be bought, lost, taken away, given away.
6. Spiritual power

#### **5. Strategies of defence III: Control**

The world is a risky place; I find safety partly through control. Control offers (an illusion of) security. We all use mechanisms of control, often entirely appropriately. But wanting to be in control can become a destructive disorder. It's a particular danger for the leader, who has the authority, power and resources to structure his environment, setting his own rules in a particular domain. That's why so often the personality of an organisation reflects the personality of its leader. Control is one of the least acknowledged defences of the leader, and often prevents them working collaboratively with others. Collaboration involves creating space for others genuinely to express themselves, allowing them to perform onstage too – not just getting them to follow your script, but being willing to follow theirs.

Leaders need to appreciate that they have the mandate and power to impose their personality on the community around them, potentially creating a world which seeks to meet their own need. They need to know themselves and be free from themselves. Otherwise – Robert Mugabe.

### **PART 2 : LOCATING THE ROOTS OF THE DEFENDED SELF**

#### **6. Our experience of trust**

To understand the route to undefendedness, we need to understand the formation of our ego – mostly in early childhood and then again in our teens, the time when the ego is most plastic. Bowlby – trust is the degree to which you can rely on a relationship. It's like a rope between two people – as a child, anchoring us to someone big and powerful who will protect us. If that wasn't there in childhood we will find it hard to trust our audience in adulthood. If we don't expect people to be interested/take us seriously, it will affect our leadership style.

#### **7. Our response to trust: the Shaping Leadership ego – overconfidence and paternalism**

Bartholomew & Horowitz identified 4 shapes of ego that come out of different nurturing environments in infancy – secure (infant has positive view of self and caregivers), dismissing (intrusive care → positive view of selves, negative of caregivers), preoccupied (insufficient attention from caregivers, positive view of caregivers but negative of self), fearful (unpredictable care → negative view of self and caregivers).

Those in the first category become Shaping leaders – high view of themselves and others. Life is unthreatening; you don't expect others to threaten you, and even if they do it would not be catastrophic; you would be fine. The danger is that too much self-esteem can be as dangerous as too little – Shapers tend to resist feedback, convinced of their own likeableness.

Examples – Tony Blair, popular, compelling, convinced of own rightness; but also the Kray brothers, whose mother thought they were angels. They became sociopaths – unable to see anyone else’s point of view. Shapers are optimistic and positive about what can be achieved; a powerful quality. They want to rescue people; they define their own reality so survive in situations that would overwhelm others. They can have a tendency to unrealism. Frontstage Shapers run a powerful show, and offer the option to compete or go away. You are either safe or unsafe with them – protected if you are with them, not if you are not. Backstage Shapers – Mafia culture, where the only thing that matters is if you belong. Many organisations have a Shaping ego at the top; they are usually warm, comfortable places for which their members feel affection, a sense of privilege, loyalty. Much about this is good and healing; but the seeds of paternalism and dependence are also sown here. Whether these organisations flower depends on the sensitivity of the leader.

## **8. Our response to trust: the Defining Leadership ego – drivenness and ambition**

The Shaping Egos have a sense of security. The other three do not. For the Defining Ego the world is a critical and judgemental place. A child may be brought up within a strong moral curriculum, with certain values and behaviours rewarded; strong, but conditional attachments. The child may start to adopt behaviours and strategies which will win favour and approval, and avoid those which will lead to disapproval. His/her landscape becomes a tale of successes achieved and failures averted. As she grows up, the potential critic becomes internalised; it’s herself. She learns it’s always best to win; she trusts herself because she has mostly achieved her targets; but not others, because she fears criticism should she fail to maintain the standard she has set. She expects to be judged for her performance, not for who she is. Cumulative achievement means nothing – it’s always the next one which counts; life is a succession of avoidances of failures. She has to hit her targets. Doesn’t have to be a judgemental home – caring parents can give out subtle signals of disappointment when hoped for positives are not achieved. Schools promote this ethos – doing well secures power, prestige, reputation.

Definers create a culture driven by the pursuit of better performance. Performance does not however lead to success – success is not experienced, only the avoidance of failure. If 9 out of 10 is attained, why wasn’t it 10? If 19 positive feedbacks are given, it’s the 1 negative one which is focussed on. Control is everything – conformity and homogeneity trump diversity and spontaneity. Delegation becomes implementation of operational orders. Risks are avoided; there is no freedom to fail.

Frontstage definers are the highest achievers; but they invest huge energy in hard work, and become driven and anxious, never able to relax. They may avoid going backstage altogether, seeing self-reflection as negative and focussing on achievement on the front stage. They may neglect their personal and emotional lives, allowing personal relationships to decay. Then the day may come when they crash, losing their job, or their spouse or relationship with their children; they realise what the frontstage focus has cost. Many never recover, lacking the personal and emotional language to even begin to address the hurts and deficits there are; others turn back to their careers and become even more driven than before. They age gracelessly, raging against their diminishing faculties, never having learned how to trust others and receive as they have to let go of their beloved control, autonomy, power. On the backstage, which is all that really matters now, they have little on which to draw.

Backstage Definers keep their enterprises to themselves, embracing fantasy and self delusion, blaming the examiner if they fail, becoming all or nothing people, oscillating from passion/commitment to detachment/passivity/depression on others. They come across as modest and compliant, but live in a private world of secret goals and visions. They are frustrated, lonely and disappointed; no one will ever know who they really are. Depression is one mechanism which lets you off the hook – nothing can be expected of you. But they long for the freedom of acceptance. Some make the journey successfully – through relationships which foster confidence and encourage them to climb into light and freedom.

## **9. Our response to trust: the Adapting Leadership ego – anxiety and over-responsibility**

Shaping and Defining Egos back themselves and expect to succeed. Adapters don’t; they trust others but not themselves. Their parents weren’t all that interested, or they were preoccupied. Conflict may not have been appropriately modelled (eg it was always suppressed).

Frontstage Adapters develop an attention-seeking performance. Some become the ‘team glue’, ensuring everyone is OK, detecting disagreement, smoothing over conflicts; they fear being left out, so they stop the group leaving people out. Others become the problem solvers, who always have something to contribute. At best all this creates warmth and care for all those around – many voluntary organisations are staffed by Adapters. The downside can be constant seeking of reassurance; ‘high maintenance’ people. They pour out their emotions; need to learn to contain emotion, but that’s risky if emotion is the currency with which they purchase attention and affection.

Backstage Adapters contain emotion rather than sharing it. This produces a deficit over time; years of suppressing your own needs and serving those of others creates anxiety, resentment, self-loathing. Adapters can get into abusive relationships. They become compliant and adaptive, their opinion of themselves becomes low. Some Christian teaching feeds into this – an emphasis on sacrifice.

The Adapter finds leadership a daily battle; it involves popularity, approval, attention; or it may go backstage and produce a persona that seems confident and in control – no one will find out the hidden insecurity. They long to be known and

accepted for who they are, but dare not take the risk of letting anyone see. They long for a return of thanks and approval and feel resentful if they don't get it.

They are the hardest workers in an organisation.

## **10. Our response to trust: the Defending Leadership ego – suspicion and over-sensitivity**

The Defending Ego has little trust of self or others. Unreliable or inconsistent caregiving. Child learns not to trust, develops the skill to read people, to divide people into yes and no (and change them from one category to the other). Defenders offer people either respect or suspicion. Life is about stopping people from hurting them. They value and demand loyalty. They are unpredictable. They can repress dissent – creates conformity but also a culture of mistrust. At best they create strong communities that revolve round loyalty; at worst they are suspicious and mean.

No single pattern will define us. The strategy we have developed on our backstage may be the opposite of that we have pursued on our frontstage. Eg backstage Shapers with a high degree of trust in selves and others may show the opposite on their frontstage, becoming more like Defenders. That's the whole point of having the two stages – everything we don't put on the one ends up on the other. So Adapters can hide their vulnerable self on the backstage and become driven and focussed on the front stage, like Definers. Or Definers can hide their need to avoid failure on the backstage and become like an Adapter on the front stage, seeming all accommodating and concealing how much it all really matters.

So it works in two pairs:

- Shaping/Defending
- Adapting/Defining.

Contradiction is at the core of us all – we can spend hours listening to others then shout at our family, we can confidently lead our companies and fail to win respect at home, we can be bold and assured in our professional relationships and fail to let anyone into our inner loneliness.

There are 4 defence strategies:

- Shapers are immunised by the security of childhood
- Definers are protected by reaching high standards
- Adapters attract praise and approval to compensate for lack of self worth
- Defenders use suspicion and loyalty to stay safe in a hostile world

Underlying each is an experience of trust. Can we change? Yes – through locating relationships with others and with Another.

## **PART III : THE SECRET OF THE UNDEFENDED LEADER**

### **11. The freedom to fail – locating the source of approval**

Freedom to lead depends on us finding a source of unconditional approval that is not jeopardised by our performance. Conventional wisdom insists that success in leadership comes from dismissing the very idea of failure. It doesn't, it comes from knowing that we are secure even if we fail; the secret of effective leadership is the freedom to live an undefended life. Eg Jonathan Edwards prepared for the Olympics by contemplating failure and deciding it wasn't the threat he feared; he went on to win gold. The idea is that we are secured not by our skills and resources but by our attachment to another, one big enough not to be overwhelmed by our failures and weaknesses. Even the best of our attachments leave a deficit; human relationships are not big enough, they are not strong enough to survive death, or true enough to give us a proper sense of ourselves. This Other has to be divine, and has to be personal.

- Shaper – the key transforming truth is that the world is neither as safe nor as unsafe as you think; the key action is to stop trying to rescue people; the key attitude is to allow feedback to touch you
- Definer – the key truth is that you are not as successful as you think you are, but you cannot be as unsuccessful as you fear. The key action is to stop wanting to win at all costs. The key attitude is to enjoy the moment and stay in it.
- Adapter – the key truth is that relationships are not as fragile as you believe. The key action is to say no. The key attitude is to trust yourself.
- Defender – the key truth is that you are safer than you realize. The key action is to stay in the relationship. The key attitude is to trust others.

### **12. The freedom to give – cultivating undefended leadership**

Greenleaf – traditional hierarchic and autocratic modes of leadership are now slowly yielding to a newer model, one that attempts to both enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of our institutions through a combination of teamwork and community, personal involvement in decision making and ethical and caring behaviour. Walker has met 4 problems when working with social leaders:

1. Some are unable to give up their roles as volunteers when it is time for them to do so – it's meeting a need.

2. Many require approval and affirmation for everything they do – they serve in order to earn a wage of praise.
3. Some cannot be served – they find it hard to receive from others. Affects many in caring professions.
4. Some resent what they have given – it was not a gift, but a duty.

They are not free.

Those who grow up in a culture of generosity make the freest and most generous leaders. Even if we didn't grow up in such an environment, we can find it in God. For all of us, there is a choice to be made – do we choose to experience life as a possession that may be taken away from us, or as a gift generously bestowed on us?

Undefended leaders:

- Experience less duty/obligation around key tasks
- Celebrate more
- Ask for help
- Go to bed earlier
- Play more sport
- Get excited about stuff
- are chaotic and messy
- Revel in each new discovery made
- Enjoy freedom of emotional expression
- Enjoy the moment
- Are intrigued by people
- Rest
- Go for every exciting adventure they can
- Go into every day not knowing what to expect

A veil has been cast over our eyes to make us believe that the world is one of duty, fear and self-protection. We must choose to inhabit a world that is basically generous, and make a commitment to trust ourselves to it. That will change the kind of leaders we are.

Shapers must choose to set aside time to listen to their staff and create space for their emotional and personal stuff; be honest about their own struggles; stick with a relationship that has lost its sparkle.

Definers must choose to put time out into their frenetic regime; let go of idols (eg a role, an ambition, a possession); spend time reflecting and waiting rather than keeping up with the news; let go of a habit they have relied on.

Adapters must choose to switch off their mobiles and be available to their family; still themselves at the start of the day before piling into their emails; hand over a role they have become possessive about; ask for help when they need it.

Defenders must choose to put themselves in unfamiliar/frightening situations; notice their emotions and take responsibility for them; risk confrontation by being honest about their feelings.

Living as an undefended leader involves living in a place that feels provisional and uncomfortable. Leadership has little to do with making decisions and getting things done; it's about having the courage to stop, to wait and be still, until you are confident and clear.

### **13. Leading as a child**

Example of an 8 year old dealing with a bully. What can we learn from children? A light touch; a capacity to wonder; trusting; learning to take responsibility.

### **14. The formation of moral authority**

Victor Frankl emerged from Auschwitz and suggested that each human being needs to find their own meaning. Meaning is the irreducible core of our human being. A lot of this is how we choose to deal with pain.

- Do we choose purpose or give in to purposeless; do we manage to make meaning out of our own pain? Churchill's sense of purpose carried him through years of depression. Shapers may have little experience of it! Definers can use it as a catalyst for life change. Adapters live with it and must learn not to be defeated by it. Defenders can use it to push for a better world.
- Do we choose love or anger? To be driven by anger is dangerous. Shapers must give love away not hoard it; definers need to allow themselves to receive; adapters need to capture every act, gesture of love and write it down so they remember they are worthy of love; defenders need to let go of their anger.
- Do we know who we are, as opposed to knowing what we do? Activism can be a strategy to distract us from emptiness. Shapers can deny pain, definers can cope with failure through domination, adapters through anxiety, defenders through anger.

## 15. Setting undefended goals

Leadership is concerned with the task of helping people to move towards fully mature, responsible personhood. The goal is for both leader and followers to be changed. 'Leadership is an activity that leads other people into full humanity: which enables them to take hold of , and take responsibility for, the life that they, as a unique, particular person within the created human race, have been given to live.' 154

### Extracts

'The idea of undefended leadership is that we are secured not by our skills and resources but by our attachment to another—one who is big enough not to be overwhelmed by our failures and weaknesses. Imagine that you walk into a room and find it full of all the people you have ever known. They are all there—all there because this is a party for you. As you enter, they turn and smile and welcome you, and you find yourself walking through a throng of friends. Music is playing and the air is full of chatter and laughter. Stories are being shared and connections made. There is apparently plenty of time to talk with everyone you want to and you converse with friends and relations, heroes and neighbours. Some you haven't seen for many years, and some you left on bad terms the last time you met; and there are conversations that need to be finished, or even begun. You realize that this room sums up your life, your presence in the world, for it contains all the people you have touched and affected in some way or another. Inside, you experience a wonderful, warm glow as you feel known and cared for and understood.

Slowly, one by one, the guests start to leave, and the room begins to empty. The music quietens down and you are left with your family. The host of memories and stories you share is like treasure—treasure that you gave them to cherish and look after: your deepest, most significant, most vulnerable being. The cracks where it has been dropped in the past remind you of the fragility and the pain you felt in earlier, unhappier times. But today, it seems, is not to be such a time. Today, you are held carefully and with respect, and you feel secure.

Finally, they, too, begin to go, one by one, and you are left, standing alone.

'Hello there,' says a voice. You turn and there, leaning against the wall, is a young man, smiling. 'You haven't seen me before, but I've seen you. Or, should I say, I've been watching you, since—000h, well, since before you even existed, actually. I

knew you when you were no bigger than a plum, growing inside your mother's womb. You see, I was there. I was there with you.

'I was there in the room when you were born, when you took your first gasp of air. I was there in those early months—I know what happened to you, I saw inside you, the things you couldn't see. I saw your fear when you were left alone and your joy when your mum returned. It was like an explosion of warmth inside you, swamping your little body. I was there when your first tooth came—and when the first tooth fell out. I saw you take your first step, and when you screamed with pain that day when you fell on your nose. I watched your hair grow. I watched it being washed and cut. I was there at the school gates when you went in, aching and scared inside where no one else could see. I knew your first house. I was there at your birthday when you were given that toy you had asked for and asked for.

'I was there, too, when you thought no one else was looking, no one could see. Yeah, I saw it all. I was there when you thought no one knew or cared or understood, in the night when you were alone, crying inside. I felt it with you. I have felt everything with you. And, now, I know what you do—each morning, when you wake, how you feel about the day, and about yourself. I know what it means for you to face another day. I have been there at your greatest victories and your greatest defeats. I have watched your life take shape. I've watched as you've hidden those parts of you away; I know the scars, and that surge of anxiety when that person comes near. I know what you long for in the deepest part of your being. I know what you believe you can achieve, and I know the frustration you feel at not being able to do it. Each night, I hold one by one your regrets for all the mistakes you have made, and I hold the shards of your shattered hopes so that they don't fall to the ground.'

He pauses and then says your name, and he says it as if he knows it very well—as if he has been saying it for years. 'I came here because you need to know one thing: that to me you are the most special and precious person in the world. And you need to know that whatever happens to you now, in the rest of your life, nothing will change that and you will never be alone.'

p103-05

### Not all children are the same...

	Shapers	Definers	Adapters	Defenders
Rather like....	an eight-year-old who is 'comfortable in their own skin'	an intense and dutiful 21-year-old heir	an over-anxious 11-year-old who is eager to please	a wary 16-year-old
Maintaining a light and playful touch	Often have no problem with this as they are generally not overwrought by their jobs.	Are often terribly earnest, intense and driven in their role. May lose sight of play altogether.	May feel guilty about play, assuming that all worthwhile work is in some sense costly and hard.	May be sceptical of such 'innocent' motives and unwilling to let themselves go.
Retaining the capacity for wonder	Are drawn to the unusual and the novel without necessarily dwelling too deeply on it.	Think that wonder doesn't get the job done, and probably put it off as a 'luxury' for a later date.	Probably suppress their sense of wonder in case it is disparaged.	May be very sensitive to awe as it feels 'big' and 'authentic'.
Strengthening the bonds of trust	Have no problem trusting others. In fact, they are probably too trusting and need to be more discerning.	Never give unqualified trust but believe that trust is earned through performance and success.	Find it very hard to ask anyone else to take things on, and as a result may prevent others from learning to trust themselves.	Are desperate to do so, but may demand such loyalty from other people that they can only disappoint.
Learning to take responsibility	Shoulder considerable weights, but may abdicate responsibility for harder and more uncomfortable tasks.	Want exclusive responsibility most of the time, but occasionally refuse to accept any responsibility at all.	Usually take inappropriate responsibility on themselves when they should be ensuring that others take it.	May not expect to be given responsibility and may at first fail—but, when trusted, prove to be highly responsible.

The challenges of leading as a child are specific to each of the four ego patterns. Each has a different set of issues, born out of their own particular 'childlike posture'. The table above outlines some of the specific responses Shapers, Definers, Adapters and Defenders will tend to make to the call to lead 'as a child'.