



Icons and Idiots: Straight Talk on Leadership

By Bob Lutz

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When Bob Lutz retired from General Motors in 2010, after an unparalleled forty-seven-year career in the auto industry, he was one of the most respected leaders in American business. He had survived all kinds of managers over those decades: tough and timid, analytical and irrational, charismatic and antisocial, and some who seemed to shift frequently among all those traits. His experiences made him an expert on leadership, every bit as much as he was an expert on cars and trucks.

Now Lutz is revealing the leaders—good, bad, and ugly—who made the strongest impression on him throughout his career. *Icons and Idiots* is a collection of shocking and often hilarious true stories and the lessons Lutz drew from them. From enduring the sadism of a Marine Corps drill instructor, to working with a washed-up alcoholic, to taking over the reins from a convicted felon, he reflects on the complexities of all-too-human leaders. No textbook or business school course can fully capture their idiosyncrasies, foibles and weaknesses – which can make or break companies in the real world.

Lutz shows that we can learn just as much from the most stubborn, stupid, and corrupt leaders as we can from the inspiring geniuses. He offers fascinating profiles of icons and idiots such as...

- **Eberhard von Kuenheim.** The famed CEO of BMW was an aristocrat-cum-street fighter who ruled with secrecy, fear, and deft maneuvering.
- **Harold A. “Red” Poling:** A Ford CEO and the ultimate bean counter. If it couldn’t be quantified, he didn’t want to know about it.
- **Lee Iacocca:** The legendary Chrysler CEO appeared to be brilliant and bold, but was often vulnerable and insecure behind the scenes.
- **G. Richard “Rick” Wagoner:** The perfect peacetime CEO whose superior intelligence couldn’t save GM from steep decline and a government bailout.

As Lutz writes:

We’ll examine bosses who were profane, insensitive, totally politically incorrect, and who “appropriated” insignificant items from hotels or the company. We’ll visit the mind of a leader who did little but sit in his office. We’ll look at another boss who could analyze a highly complex profit-and-loss statement or a balance sheet at a glance, yet who, at times, failed to grasp the simplest financial mechanisms—how things actually worked in practice to create the numbers in the

real world.

The result is a powerful and entertaining guide for any aspiring leader.

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Editorial Review

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Lutz (*Car Guys vs. Bean Counters*, 2011) spent 47 years in the car industry, working for iconic automakers GM, Ford, Chrysler, and BMW. In his career, he witnessed leadership personalities from the admirable to the buffoonish. But he goes beyond his car career to offer a disparate collection of portraits of leaders, from his high-school teacher and marine drill instructor to Lee Iacocca, CEO of Chrysler. Most leaders are mentally and emotionally askew, he asserts as he portrays the men (they're all men) he worked with or under as demanding, often offensive, brutally honest, and sometimes borderline cruel. He remembers Iacocca as an insecure man threatened by subordinates; another auto executive seems to fit the idiot portion of the title. Still, Lutz finds some leadership qualities, or at least cautionary examples of what not to do, in each of his subjects. And it seems to be the point of these entertaining, insightful behind-the-scenes tales of corporate culture that, while leadership can come in all kinds of quirky packages, the greatest benefit lies in the lasting impact it has on the people who work for him—or her. --Vanessa Bush

About the Author

Bob Lutz had a legendary 47-year career as one of the most respected "car guys" in history. He held senior leadership positions at four of the world's leading automakers--GM, Ford, Chrysler, and BMW. He was most recently the vice chairman of General Motors from 2001 to 2010, the years leading up to and through GM's bankruptcy. He is the bestselling author of *Guts: 8 Laws of Business from One of the Most Innovative Business Leaders of Our Time* and *Car Guys vs. Bean Counters: The Battle for the Soul of American Business*.

Users Review

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