

TRUE NORTH

by

Bill George with Peter Sims

SYNOPSIS AND REASON FOR SELECTION

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Bill George was a keynote speaker at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' annual conference in San Antonio in 2008. I had no idea who he was except for the description in the conference program, and his credentials were impressive: professor of management practice at the Harvard Business School; former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, the world's leading medical technology company; board member of Goldman Sachs, Exxon Mobil, and Novartis; and other accomplishments. So I attended the plenary session at which he spoke. I was not prepared for what I heard.

George spoke about leaders of companies and organizations, leaders that he and his co-writer Peter Sims had interviewed, their experiences as leaders, and what character and leadership traits were important to them during times of triumph and tragedy. He spoke about his own journey, the critical times in his own life such as the death of his wife. And he spoke about discovering "the internal compass that guides you successfully through life" that he describes in the book *True North*. That this leader could be so open and transparent about his life and the values and principles that guided him was amazing to me, and I see him in my mind on that stage and hear his voice as I read the pages of *True North* again or just see the book on my shelf.

True North is divided into three main sections. The first section is Leadership Is a Journey in which the stories of a number of leaders are told, anecdotes that help us understand how leaders discover their values and their inner compass. The second section is Discover Your Authentic Leadership, and in this section George describes in compelling fashion five facets of authentic leadership that we can learn and practice. The third and last section is Empowering People to Lead, using what we have learned about authentic leadership and our inner compass to empower others. In the appendices to the book, the authors provide leadership exercises for each chapter, exercises that we will use to enliven our discussions of *True North*.

I agree with presidential advisor David Gergen, one of those interviewed who wrote in his Foreword to the book "But what ultimately distinguishes the great leaders from the mediocre are the personal, inner qualities – qualities that are hard to define but are essential for success, qualities that each of us must develop for ourselves, and qualities that are explored here in these pages with great clarity and insight"

Join me as we read *True North*, and explore for yourself what is your authentic leadership and what is your internal compass that guides you successfully through life. I certainly look forward to gaining more insights as I read the book once again and discuss its contents with you.