

TED^X Berlin Talk video, 15.55 min, Feb 2024

https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_gutmann_are_we_celebrating_the_wrong_leaders

Martin Gutmann is an author, speaker and scholar interested in how the past can help **shed light on** today's **most pressing challenges**. His message goes that there is a tendency to **celebrate leaders** for their dramatic words and actions in times of crisis — but we often **overlook** truly great leaders who avoid the crisis **to begin with**. Historian Martin Gutmann **challenges us to rethink** what effective leadership actually looks like.

TAKEAWAY extracts from the VIDEO (the **numbers** are those in the TRANSCRIPT):

1. Leadership development today is a 60-billion-dollar industry (42).
2. [] the **action fallacy**—our mistaken belief that the best leaders are those who generate the most noise, action and sensational activity in the most dramatic circumstances (53).
3. "Wow, what a guy! He really fought hard to get himself out of that crisis." (68)
4. "Meh, that looks pretty easy." (73) (laughter)
5. In people who **appear confident**, regardless of how competent they are. And we have an **unyielding** admiration for people who are **perpetually** busy, regardless of what they're actually doing (123).
6. "Since we reward people who are good in crises, and ignore people who are such good managers that there are few crises, people soon learn to **seek out or reframe** situations as crises." (146)
7. But **as soon as** it's embedded in a story, the dramatic details **pull us in like a magnet** and give us a **false sense of inspiration** (154).
8. [] she (T: Prof Sadun) calls it **boring management** (168) (laughter).
9. [] but it's **the real toolkit** of good leaders (172).
10. **resist the temptation to be dazzled by tales** of adventure and **derring-do**, and take a moment to **look below the surface** or in the quieter corners of your team (183).

TAKEAWAYS generated by AI at https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_gutmann_are_we_celebrating_the_wrong_leaders

Society often celebrates leaders who manage crises with flair, while overlooking those who quietly prevent disaster. Books and media praise Ernest Shackleton's adventures, yet Roald Amundsen, the most successful polar explorer, remains largely forgotten. The real cost is that organizations reward noise and drama over careful planning, missing the steady hands that keep teams on course. Great leadership often looks boring on the surface, but produces **lasting results**.

The 'action fallacy' leads people to equate visible action with effective leadership.

Crises can be the result of poor preparation, not just bad luck **or heroism** (T ?).

Behind-the-scenes management, though unglamorous, consistently delivers better outcomes.

Organizations that reward dramatic leaders risk creating toxic, crisis-driven cultures.

Celebrating quiet competence builds stronger, more resilient teams.

