

## EXCERPT



### **Tempered Resilience** *How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change*

November 10, 2020 | \$25, 240 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4164-6

What type of leadership is needed in a moment that demands adaptive change? Tod Bolsinger, author of *Canoeing the Mountains*, is uniquely positioned to explore the qualities of adaptive leadership in contexts ranging from churches to nonprofit organizations. He deftly examines both the external challenges we face and the internal resistance that holds us back. Also available: *Tempered Resilience Study Guide*.

## Molded and Transformed

Blacksmithing serves as a perfect metaphor for the long, hard, repetitive, seemingly violent method of transforming a leader. If the purpose of a transformational leader is, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, to “hew out of a mountain of despair stones of hope” then we would expect that process to be as transformative for a leader as the process of taking steel and shaping it, hardening it, and tempering it to become a tool that can stand up to both the pounding of the task and the resistance of the rock.

Like the steel shaped by blacksmiths, leaders take on the characteristics of resilience that will enable them to hew hope from despair, there is a long process of heating, holding, hammering, and tempering ahead that begins even before leaders know it or recognize it as such.

Leaders, like tempered tools, are only shaped in the shop. They are only forged in the furnace. They are only made in a place like this filled with both serious work and potential danger. And just as we can't learn to blacksmith or be forged like steel from reading a book or from sitting on a bench, we can't learn to lead without entering into the actual place where the work gets done.

This leads us to the first of two critical introductory points: *Leaders are formed in leading*. There are books we can read, courses we can take, lessons we can learn through lectures and conversations. But the tempered, resilient leader is forged only in the process of leading that adds stress to the raw material of our lives. Which is why it is so difficult and feels so dangerous.

Leadership formation is a hard and humbling repetitive process of personal transformation. When the focus of the leader is on concepts in classes and programs instead of context, and when resistance leads to a lack of reflection, very soon the swirl of anxiety that accompanies organizational challenges leads to the failure of nerve and failure of heart that occurs when resilience has not been developed for the leadership challenge.

This leads to the second introductory point: the forming of a resilient leader that occurs amid the very demands of leadership is an ongoing, intense, repetitive, and humbling process of personal transformation.



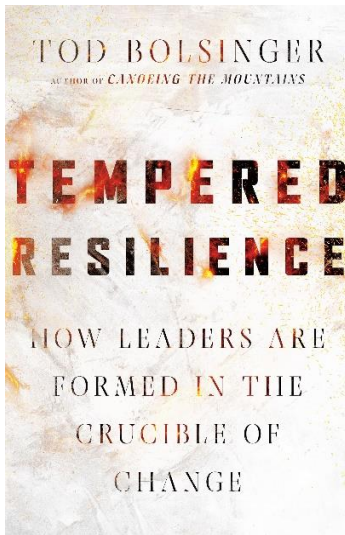
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*"In Tempered Resilience, Tod Bolsinger cuts to the core of why so many gifted leaders struggle in periods of transition and how leaders can position themselves to thrive amid the chaos of change. Full of scholarly analysis and personal anecdotes, this book will both encourage your soul and challenge you to embrace the extensive life transformation that accompanies leadership."*

*Linda A. Livinastone, president of Baylor University*

Whether it is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. trying to hold together a coalition of civil rights organizations on one side and contend with the vitriol of racist structures and attitudes that have oppressed his people for four hundred years on the other, a nonprofit leader trying to keep offering vital services when government funding has run out, or a pastor leading a congregation to care more for their neighbors than their own preferences while the church is hemorrhaging members: Leaders are formed in leading, and leadership formation is a hard and humbling, repetitive process of personal transformation.

What makes leadership so daunting, in the final analysis, is the burden of responsibility for the flourishing or faltering, the success or failure of an organization, community, or movement that has been entrusted to your stewardship. *When the challenge of the moment moves from maintaining and preserving to changing and enduring, the stakes are raised and the heat is turned up.* The weight can begin to squeeze the air out of one's lungs. Once we realize that we are facing a challenge that, if it fails, other people will be profoundly impacted, a leader must learn to face that reality head-on. This was as true for Moses in leading the people of God to freedom as it is for a pastor leading a congregation to a new day of mission.

It is important to note that perhaps the most important concept to grasp about the formative process of leading is that it is not necessarily—or even mostly—connected to a leadership role. Leadership is an action, a function, a particular way of focusing one's effort and attention of the functioning of a group so that they will "tackle tough challenges and thrive." Leading is not about a title, authority, or position in an organizational chart. *Leadership is about bringing change—in whatever role you occupy.*

No matter what position we fulfill in an organizational system of any kind (including any group, congregation, family, neighborhood) if we assume responsibility for bringing change, and if that change requires people to change—and will require us to change—*then* we are leading.

- Every time we step into a space where transformation is both required and resisted, we are leading.
- Every time we step toward a challenge that requires that others step up with us, we are leading.
- Every time we join with others in a cause that requires still more to join our cause, we are leading.
- Every time we embrace conflict as a means to deepen understanding and strengthen connection, we are leading.
- Every time we take responsibility for our actions and face the reality that others will shirk their responsibilities, we are leading.
- Every time the change that is needed in the world requires us to change ourselves, we are leading.

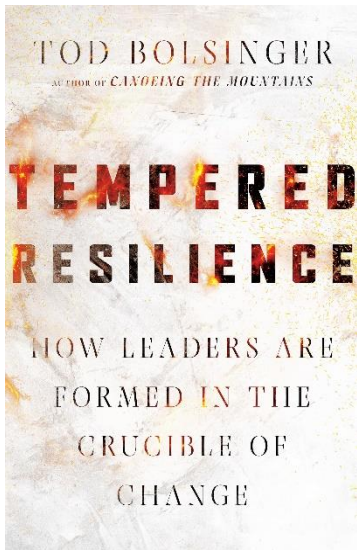


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*"Tod's insightful understanding of leadership effectiveness skillfully delves into the core character traits necessary for a leader to prevail through both the rejection of and resistance to transformation. As a thoughtful, innovative leader, Tod's acumen makes Tempered Resilience a critical read for every leader seeking to navigate an organization through an ever-changing environment."*

*Santiago "Jimmy" Mellado, president and CEO of Compassion International*

And the key difference between leadership today and leadership roles of the past is that the frequency and speed of change mean that leaders are almost constantly in a crucible moment. Where at one time a specific crisis was the crucible that shaped a leader, today that crucible is the constancy of change. Change requires us to learn from past lessons, insights, values, behaviors, and commitments and discern which to discard and which to adapt and then apply those new lessons, insights, values, behaviors, and commitments to the present challenges in new—and risky—ways.

In blacksmithing, steel is forged into a tool by the addition of stress. High heat, hammering, and even the use of the tool itself adds more stress to the steel. Indeed, the very same microscopic process that transforms the steel into something that can become a tool occurs when the tool is used. Every time that a hammer and chisel are used on a stone, every time that a pick is used in a mine, every time that an ax is used to chop wood, more stress is added to the tool. And stress is what makes the tool stronger, harder, tougher—and more prone to breaking. Too much stress and the very same tool that was cutting stones out of a chunk of granite crumbles under the pounding. For a leader, there is a similar process. *Stress, when handled well, makes the leader stronger.*

—Adapted from chapter three, "Working: Leaders Are Formed in Leading"



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Tod Bolsinger (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is the vice president and chief of leadership formation and associate professor of leadership formation at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. For seventeen years, he was the senior pastor of San Clemente Presbyterian Church in San Clemente, California. A frequent speaker and consultant, he serves as an executive coach in transformational leadership.

# Becoming a Stronger, More Flexible Leader

**Is this title a follow-up to your book *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*?**

**Tod Bolsinger:** Yes, it is the follow up to *Canoeing the Mountains*. However, *Tempered Resilience* speaks to an even broader audience: Christian pastors and organizational leaders who are facing internal resistance to the changes that they need to bring for their organizations and congregations to thrive in this rapidly changing world.

**What kinds of questions were people asking that prompted you to write this follow-up book?**

**Tod:** As I traveled across the country (and to three other countries) speaking on leading adaptive change in a rapidly changing world, I frequently encountered leaders who were struggling with discouragement because of the difficulties of dealing with internal resistance from key stakeholders in their organization. One pastor of a large congregation said to me, "The question I find myself asking is not 'Can I learn the skills I need to lead change?' but rather 'Can I survive it?'" This book is my response to those leaders.

**Why does a leader need to develop what you call "tempered resilience"?**

**Tod Bolsinger:** A leader needs to develop "tempered resilience" in order to transform resistance within followers, especially when followers turn on them, oppose them, or sabotage them. "Tempered resilience" allows leaders to face organizational challenges and develop the capacity to "hew out of a mountain of despair stones of hope" (as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said). That capacity is formed in the midst of the leadership challenge through reflection, relationships, and a rule of life in a rhythm of leading and not leading.

**Describe your six-step approach to becoming a tempered leader.**

**Tod:** Adaptive leaders have stamina, strength of purpose, and the perseverance necessary to lead a church, institution, or organization through deep organizational change. Tempered, resilient leaders are grounded, teachable, attuned, adaptable, and tenacious. Tempered leaders are developed through a six-step process:

1. Working: Leaders are formed in leading.
2. Heating: Strength is forged in self-reflection.
3. Holding: Vulnerable leadership requires relational security.
4. Hammering: Stress makes a leader.
5. Hewing: Resilience takes practice.
6. Tempering: Resilience comes through a rhythm of leading and not leading.



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