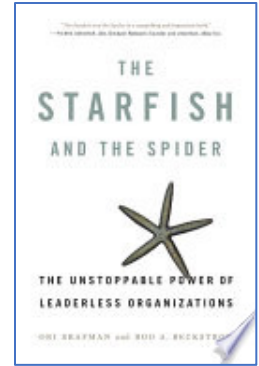




Read2Lead Module

The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations

by Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom



Book Summary from Google Books: “If you cut off a spider’s leg, it’s crippled; if you cut off its head, it dies. But if you cut off a starfish’s leg it grows a new one, and the old leg can grow into an entirely new starfish.

What is the hidden power behind the success of Wikipedia, craigslist, and Skype? What do eBay and General Electric have in common with the abolitionist and women’s rights movements? What fundamental choice put General Motors and Toyota on vastly different paths? How winning a Supreme Court case be the biggest mistake MGM could have made?

After five years of groundbreaking research, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom share some unexpected answers, gripping stories, and a tapestry of unlikely connections. *The Starfish and the Spider* argues that organizations fall into two categories: traditional spiders, which have a rigid hierarchy and top-down leadership, and revolutionary starfish, which rely on the power of peer relationships.

The Starfish and the Spider explores what happens when starfish take on spiders (such as the music industry vs. Napster, Kazaa, and the P2P services that followed). It reveals how established companies and institutions, from IBM to Intuit to the US government, are also learning how to incorporate starfish principles to achieve success. The book explores:

- * How the Apaches fended off the powerful Spanish army for 200 years
- * The power of a simple circle
- * The importance of catalysts who have an uncanny ability to bring people together
- * How the Internet has become a breeding ground for leaderless organizations
- * How Alcoholics Anonymous has reached untold millions with only a shared ideology and without a leader

The Starfish and the Spider is the rare book that will change how you understand the world around you.

Brafman, O., & Beckstrom, R. (2006). *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*. New York: Penguin Group.

What is Read2Lead?

Read2Lead is a series of book studies published by the Center for Junior Officers, a small Army research center dedicated to empowering junior officers to develop themselves and their teams. Read2Lead modules give junior officers a ready-to-use product that they can integrate into leader professional development programs.

What's in this module?

Every Read2Lead module contains:

- A short summary of the book that you can circulate to prime people for reading
- Advice for running your Read2Lead session
- A series of questions that can be used in multiple sessions, with options for using the questions over different lengths of time
- Additional resources that may be helpful for the facilitator

What do I need to provide to run a Read2Lead program?

First, the time. Read2Lead sessions work best when they're done over multiple sessions, so participants can digest books in small "chunks" instead of trying to cram them in all at once. Make sure you give your participants enough time to read the book and not fake the funk.

Second, the books. Books can be purchased with a government purchase card if they remain in the hands of the unit. Buying books for a Read2Lead session can be a great kickstarter for a battalion or even brigade library. You can also provide the books to Soldiers with the expectation that they pass them along to another Soldier when they are done with them. If you choose this approach, you should ensure you mark the books appropriately per the purchasing regulations and legal guidance of your organization.

Third, the space. Read2Lead sessions should be conducted in spaces where everyone can hear and see one another. Be creative: maybe you do them as hip-pocket training on a range, or at the end of motor stables. Or as a brownbag lunch in a barracks dayroom.

When you run the actual session, think of it as a time for your Soldiers to think outside the box, discuss something beyond the day-to-day concerns of the unit, and improve their communication skills. The questions provided on the subsequent pages are a starting point, but feel free to add or substitute your own to make the session more meaningful for your Soldiers.

The Starfish and the Spider, 4 Week Program Questions

This book went viral upon publication in 2006 and quickly ended up on military senior leader reading lists. The lessons and discussions remain timeless and worthy of discussion. The book is a quick, compelling read and easily digested with charts and graphics. Four weeks is ideal for focused discussion, or consider allowing the audience to digest the whole book and sequence sessions as your battle rhythm allows.

Week 1: *Introduction, Chapters 1-2 (55 pages, with graphs)*

- The introduction describes popular scientific theories regarding the human brain's top-down structure and "chain of command" (p.3). In what ways are our neural network similar to other networks in the Army? How is it similar to terrorist networks?
- The authors describe the tactics used by the Apache Indians during the Spanish American wars and how the Nant'ans served as influential figures in their success (p. 15-21). Who are the Nant'ans in the Army? What qualities must leaders at all levels possess in order to be successful in today's operational environment?
- How does the Apache story relate to the idea of succession of command in battle? Do we train our Soldiers to decentralize this way in the US Army?

Week 2: *Chapters 3-5 (72 pages)*

- Chapters 3 and 4 describe examples of Starfish organizations (Craigslist, Skype, Wikipedia, etc.) and the Five legs of the Starfish (Circles, Catalysts, Ideology, Preexisting Network, The Champion). According to these definitions, are there cultures within the in the Army that are the more "Starfishy"?
- One of the most powerful components of Starfish organizations is the foundation built on trust-based circles (Leg 1, p. 90). Where do you see these norms forming naturally among brothers and sisters in arms and in what ways can we encourage and build circles within our ranks?
- One of the criteria of a profession is that it maintains and enforces moral and ethical standards. "Leg 3" of Starfish organizations is a shared ideology (p. 94). How does this relate to the importance of Army values in our profession of arms?
- The differences between catalysts and CEO's are highlighted on p.130. Who in the Army are the catalysts and champions for Starfish concepts? How can you become a catalyst for positive change in your unit?

Week 3: *Chapters 6-7 (43 pages)*

- The book cites terrorist networks as an example of decentralized leadership and the strategies for taking on decentralization are outlined in Chapter 6 (p.133). How does this translate into military tactics to fight a Starfish organization? Is there a military resolution to the Global War on Terror?
- A popular phrase that emerged with the Army's Counter Insurgency doctrine was that "Every Soldier is a sensor". How does this relate to the Starfish concept of gaining knowledge from the fringe? How can Army systems support the flow of information from the empowered edge to key decision makers?
- How do the Army's policies and doctrine support or hinder an organization with no leaders or leaders at all levels?

Week 4: *Chapters 8-9 (27 pages)*

- The military has a strong centralized institutional process driven by strategic guidance, however, military theorists such as Clausewitz describe the nature of war as "chaotic". Does our institutional Army reflect the best organizational structure to deal with the chaos of war? Where does today's institutional Army fall on the spectrum between chaos and bureaucracy? Where is the "Sweet Spot" (Chapter 8) and how does the Army maintain this position?
- Consider the ten rules outlined in Chapter 9 (p. 199). Are they accurate? Does the Army need to change its processes to survive in the New World? If so, how?
- Does the modular transformation of the Army uphold the Starfish principle along the "Diseconomics of Scale" (p.201)? How does our current force structure support or challenge the doctrinal warfighting principle of Unity of Command?
- The subtitle of the book cites "Leaderless organizations". Do the concepts and examples presented apply to the Army? How and at what level?

Additional Resources:

- [Ori Brafman](#): The co-author's website features other leadership books, interviews, and articles.
- [Starfish Leadership.com](#): Programs offered by the co-author.
- [Broadening Opportunities Programs](#): Starfish Leadership has collaborated with the Army in the past and offered as a Strategic Broadening Seminar. Learn more about all of the different scholarships, fellowships, and internships on the HRC site- talk to your mentors about working these into your long term plans!

The Starfish and the Spider, 2 Week Program Questions

If you are pressed for time, you can split the book discussions since it's a quick read. Here are abbreviated questions for consideration.

Week 1: Introduction, Chapters 1-5 (127 pages)

- Some examples of Starfish organizations are presented throughout the first few chapters (Craigslist, Skype, Wikipedia, etc.) and the Five legs of the Starfish (Circles, Catalysts, Ideology, Preexisting Network, The Champion). According to these definitions, are there cultures within the in the Army that are the more "Starfishy"?
- One of the criteria of a profession is that it maintains and enforces moral and ethical standards. "Leg 3" of Starfish organizations is a shared ideology (p. 94). How does this relate to the importance of Army values in our profession of arms?
- The differences between catalysts and CEO's are highlighted on p.130. Who in the Army are the catalysts and champions for Starfish concepts? How can you become a catalyst for positive change in your unit?

Week 2: Chapters 6-9 (70 pages)

- How do the Army's policies and doctrine support or hinder an organization with no leaders or leaders at all levels?
- Consider the ten rules outlined in Chapter 9 (p. 199). Are they accurate? Does the Army need to change its processes to survive in the New World? If so, how?
- The subtitle of the book cites "Leaderless organizations". Do the concepts and examples presented apply to the Army? How and at what level?

Additional Resources:

- [Ori Brafman](#): The co-author's website features other leadership books, interviews, and articles.
- [Starfish Leadership.com](#): Programs offered by the co-author.
- [Broadening Opportunities Programs](#): Starfish Leadership has collaborated with the Army in the past and offered as a Strategic Broadening Seminar. Learn more about all of the different scholarships, fellowships, and internships on the HRC site- talk to your mentors about working these into your long term plans!