

BEPPE CARRELLA

# DON QUIXOTE

THE LEADERSHIP  
OF NEAR-WIN



FOREWORDED BY  
MARIA CRISTINA KOCH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
MARCELLA MALLEN

goWare



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## DESCRIPTION

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What can Don Quixote, patron saint of the resilient, dauntless champion of near-victories, teach us about leadership? And who, much like him, wouldn't want to be a knight? To live a thousand adventures, to amaze and astonish, to be rewarded with fame, to be the carrier of great ideals and values. What happened to that dream? We are so quick to label believers as fools... and who is more of a dreamer than the don? Someone who lost his marbles, who has started to see beauty in his surroundings. Who calls the "truth" of this world into question. The don has a vision, which compels him to set off with nag and squire, just moving forward. We too might become the heroes of the story, one failure after the other. Uphold our ideals when everything around us is falling apart. Take our talent into our own hands. And well, to quote Will Eisner, it doesn't matter whether Don Quixote truly existed, what matters is that his dream did. Foreword by Cristina Koch.

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BEPPE CARRELLA (Senior Business Analyst in SINFO-ONE) cut his teeth as a manager in the ICT arena and has acted as CEO in several ict companies both in Italy and abroad. He is the founder of bclab and was a professor at both Italian and foreign universities. In 2013, his first book *Provocative Thoughts* among the ten most prominent works about human resources management according to prestigious American magazine hr.com. His book *Pinocchio. Leadership Without Lies* (2018) was also published by goWare.



## How to read this book

*Don Quixote: The Leadership of Near-Win* might surprise you: on one hand, it is a non-fiction work on management with several reading levels, in constant dialogue with Miguel de Cervantes's classic; on the other hand, it is a state-of-the-art book with links you can click on (in the digital version) and QR codes you can scan (also present in the paperback version, which you can decode using a smartphone device or a tablet), leading to a variety of media sources.

Here is a brief legend to facilitate the understanding of the text to fully enhance its multimedia potential.

«I know who I am» The gray highlighted texts are excerpts from *Don Quixote by de Cervantes*. The consulted edition being the Harper Collins edition translated by Edith Grossman.



The sections marked by a figure in the margins are digressions by the author, which expand the discourse by tacking topics or making in-depth considerations related to the main subject matter.

**Napoleon** The words written in blue (in the digital version) mark the presence of a hyperlink



This widget marks the beginning of an excerpt from a song lyric which can be listened in its entirety on Youtube, or other platforms, by activating the QR code (in the paperback version) or by clicking on

■ ■ Listen ■ ■ or ■ ■ Watch ■ ■ (in the digital version).

To my shadows. Beware, I am flushing you out. It will take me some more time, but I'm watching you. I know where you are. I know what you want, but I still need you. I couldn't write if you weren't there. There would be no more alibis. If you weren't there, I couldn't look the Don in the eye, I could never talk to my friend Sancho. You are all in my mind and because of that I am never alone.

*There is a place  
Where I can go  
When I feel low  
When I feel blue  
And it's my mind*  
The Beatles — [There's a place](#)

# Foreword.

## The Splendid Folly of Living

by Maria Cristina Koch

This new work that Beppe offers us is a moving ballad about the meaning of a life dedicated to dreaming, about the courage to make your dream a reality, about the unhinging feeling when somebody steals it away from you and continues the story their own way, about being resilient, about seamless loyalty, about the meaning of time and knowing when to stop.

Reading it has been a big adventure: you relate to it, you get upset, you wish you could change the story, and yet you are amazed, and grateful, at the greatness of Beppe's knowledge, at how nonchalantly he scatters along the reading path, like flower petals, a song here, some cultured lines there, and then a joke or some everyday incident that makes you smile. Colorful, differing petals capable of *diverting* your attention.

Indeed, this is a book where you will find yourself distracted over and over again, not because you lose your focus, but because you venture into many a world, into a thousand thoughts, into traces of paths you will leave behind to move forward and beyond.

A book about the vast and difficult topic of exercising leadership knightly, with that courteousness which is not couth but endless, respectful and admiring attention to the other person, to other people.

A business world, to which Beppe addresses himself, that appears to him as narrow-minded, paltry, stuck into a trivializing habit snuffing out any rush and joy of living these roles, tarnishing all hope.

But, to pick up the threads of the many thoughts and thought patterns that this book elicits, here I shall like to establish some of the themes, more than mere notions, that I found singularly capable to possess the mind:

First, **madness**: indeed, it is easy to say “insanity”, but madness morphs and shifts in

meaning and features depending on the different eras and ages of life. We look with indulgent tenderness at young people's follies, as if in the attempt (the idea of "distraction" returns yet again) to divert them from them, we would dim the light in their eyes, bring them "back to earth". Not for them to tread it with their heads held up high, at a fast pace, but we would have them adapt to its well known firmness, which everyone else (us, too?) can share, and settle down. But folly in adults, no, that we find intolerable, reckless, irresponsible. When you reach a certain age, you just cannot keep on dreaming, imagining, inventing; it is unsettling, it is no good: with a gentle but firm hand, we attempt to bring them back to their senses, to put aside this strange oddness that, you must realize, is only bound to let you down (we know that, and deep inside you know it too, don't you?).

Then, maybe, Don Quixote is given leave because of his age, being well beyond his prime and too late to settle down and raise children. Everything holds different value and meaning as the years go by, indeed. For instance: could we ever call our senior citizens who, to our shock, use marijuana, awful, insulting names such as "junkie" or "druggy"?

That is right, because glorious old age, especially nowadays, is not at all limited to arranging the clothes we wish to be buried in, but it is also looked at as the time when we can finally do as we please, say and do previously unspeakable things, to go and truly experience the process of "becoming a knight".

Such a grandiose plan, such a happy dream you should share with a comrade in arms and in life in order to provide actual meaning and dialogue to what is about to happen, to what we are about to experience. Doing things for real, a luxury which we can only afford after a certain age, after a sufficient amount of valuable experiences. Traveling the world to make all that we have studied, all that we have learned, all that we have devoted endless time to, a reality. So that the people who, up until then, had otherwise been our men, our comrades, our loyal servants, are left astonished, dissatisfied and worried.

Madness? Of course, but such a breath of life, at long last!

**Ethics in the business world:** but if we are leaders, then the fact that we have turned into one necessarily implies the presence of other people, our Sanchos. What are referred to as "seconds". Much like in every book of chivalry the hero has a second by his side, whatever position we hold in the company, we are bound to have second by

our side (or at our service?).

Despite their many roles in the company, what we are interested in doing is highlighting is the sort of relationship the leader (and us, too) builds and develops with them.

Are they a witless servant who must follow orders? Are they the one who go up to other people to persuade them of the righteousness of my actions and my plans? Are they sort of my loudspeaker, or even what is called a dauphin, the heir who, if they behave, they will get to inherit my treasure?

Indeed, something different might happen, depending on what we mean to achieve by having them by our side. It is conceivable that they become my mentor, my beacon who to fully understand my own plans, someone to shed a different light on my thoughts, essentially someone to hint: "What if, instead...?"

Is it acceptable for a leader to obtain feedback on the legitimacy of their thoughts and wants and goals in the form his second's opinion? Of course not, I only compare myself with my equals: it is a matter of rank, how could my Sancho ever understand my plan? If that could be, he'd be the one in charge, wouldn't he?

The task of the so called seconds is crucial to any sort of leadership: a second who only follows orders betrays their office, to some extent. They are our ally, our accomplice, the one we talk things over with to see them in new, different perspectives. And of course it is no coincidence that in the novel by Miguel de Cervantes it is Sancho who evolves and gloriously succeeds, which Don Quixote is denied again and again.

Yet, Don Quixote looks at Sancho with more and more interest as time goes by, he gives him advice, he raises him, in a way, just not with the aim of making him his clone. Not at all.

With unlimited kindness, Don Quixote offers Sancho his experience and his knowledge of life, dreams and defeat, so that he may put it to use and come back to Don Quixote with another, different, innovative rendition of he has been entrusted with.

Don Quixote stays by his side so he can become a man, a hero, the master of his own thoughts and goals. At the same time, Don Quixote, who is at a different stage of his life, who has had different experiences, and holds a different rank, deals with and shapes his life, pushing and yanking at it.

Indeed, they stand beside one another. To an extent, this is the story of every lasting

marriage: rooting my partner as they make a life for themselves, while I try building mine, fighting, bickering but also offering them what we think we have and know.

Sancho's growth and authentic blossoming, though he never lose touch with his roots, his old stock of personal experience, are rarely put in the spotlight: this is also why this book by Beppe is so invaluable. Being by the other's side without pietism and paternalism, but in an open, attentive and kind manner, offering support, advice, adequate information along the way: this is how you treat the other party with respect and attention, hoping they can find and achieve success, in the manner that suits them best.

Which is pretty darn difficult and complicated but also far-reaching and of nourishingly satisfactory

**The lie:** ill-used and criticized, the lie is none other than an idea, with a broader scope than the so called truth as, in order to deny it, it must contain it and even go past it. Lies are custom-made for that specific person, for that specific context, in that moment, whilst truth enjoys its adamantine certainty no matter its recipient.

A lie is a *vision* and every vision is a lie: it has nothing to do with reality, if anything, it is familiar with it and exceeds it, conjuring up something different, which arises from reality just to replace and reshape it.

Therefore, the point is not whether your *vision* is truthful or not, the point is, as always, what you do with it.

Every recipient is welcome to come up with their own rendition, to offer to play a role in the new conjured scenario, to make their contribution in carefully, attentively giving it definition and structure, to reject it, if they wish, putting forward another, different proposal for imaginary vision.

This is not about the truth, this is about ethics, about taking responsibility.

In the face of a *vision*, in the face of the tale of a dream, there is no point in challenging its legitimacy: if you notice a weak spot, well, that is precisely why it was related to you, so you can play your part in strengthening it. Not so that you can shake your head condescendingly, or as if it were an assignment handed over to the teacher, which they fail because it's incorrect, because there are some mistakes.

The purpose of a *vision*, the magic of being part of it, is not to achieve it the way as we imagined it, of course not, to embark on a journey, to reach the destination and see what happens along the way.

An unpredictable path by definition, otherwise there would be nothing but the familiar way home.

**What' is your name?** Don Quixote takes on many a name, every time he has gone through something, he carries with him a new name: the Knight of the Sorrowful Face, the Knight of the Lions... fair enough, you are a knight, but a knight how, of what? What about right now, at this time, after your last experience, what sort of knight are you?

It is a truly intriguing question, and your bold, shallow answer "Me? I am still myself!" is disappointing.

Yourself who? When, where...

If we don't acknowledge the changes we go through and the many names that define us by reason of our experiences, well, we are downgrading our life, from a unique tale to a mere handbook, a summary of how decent a person we are, how right we have been. The only thing missing is the sad "I told you so, I knew it, this is how it is and the only way it can be".

You take your life, wash it up with bleach to get all the stains out, you carefully iron away the creases... that's just sad!

But when they ask you your name, they are asking you to forge a bond, to form a relationship, to offer to play a role, writing the script as you go, live. I don't care what you do, what I want to know is who you are so I can understand in what way the things you do belong to you, whether I can see you in them.

You will find, there is a ton of people that do what you do as well, but I care about the things you do because it's you doing them. The "you" who clicks with me, who invents itself with me the way I invent myself with you.

**Life is a bit like theater:** that's right, after all, we all start out as audience members, we start out by entering an established, separate world; we are like Pinocchio at the puppet show. We are left amazed, captivated by the performance, but then we start to wish we could enter the game.

So we are born as Pinocchios and we become Don Quixotes? If only we all could do that, it would be perfect, but you can't watch the show and then ask, or maybe even demand, to be part of it, just to criticize it.

Couldn't it be that we are so "conceited" that we intend to wipe the slate clean to give

rise and birth to a whole new world, with no roots binding us to the ground, without history as a heavy baggage?

To become part of the show is a bit like moving out: if you carry everything with you, it's like you haven't left at all. On the other hand, if you don't carry anything with you, still it would not feel like moved out.

When you enter your new house, you carry with you your precious personal belongings and ask if it can, if it will have them.

From there on, the new house will start to feel our own, as we gradually ask permission to call it ours, to say "My home, yes, this is my home".

Only then have we become the masters of our house and, from audience members, as the years go by, we learn to become the lead character, but that happens if we ask permission, if we propound and negotiate, not if we redo an ancient farmhouse from the ground up to turn it into a cutting edge mansion, nor if we turn an old into the house of the future.

And yet, how wonderful it is to contrast the different items, the antique furniture, which belongs in our previous life, with the lustrous splendor of our brand new kitchen. We offer them to the house, we arrange them and that space, too, becomes a little more our own. Our new home, our life, like a god we make our gracious, knightly offerings to, to earn its blessing.

**Your whole life ahead of you:** as our life flashes before our eyes, we spread it out like tapestry, like Don Juan outside the inn, here too we spend some time searching our hearts, sad and despondent, how gloomy!

How come we are so drawn to the idea of constantly looking for mistakes, for deceits, for misunderstandings? How come we can't look at ourselves, too, with kind eyes, appreciative eyes that linger, look back to make a connection, just because it feels good to learn, to know things, to gain some experience...

Everything feels like a test, with the consequent fear of failure when we under scrutiny. Yet, must examining a draft, even in a company, mean be on the lookout for weak spots? Mistakes, minor details underestimated or overlooked by its creator?

And what if, instead, we just got used to the idea of following in the footsteps of those who have already come up with and proposed something, what if we tried, once more, to understand and share it, and then, if necessary, ask for amendments and additions,



wouldn't that be a better way?

And much more nutritious, as we would also acquire other people's opinions, their problem-solving ontology, how they evaluate and pinpoint whatever they deem worth of further exploration.

We all come out of it much bigger, more sated, none of us forced to endure painful or humiliating rejection: we simply happen to realize between all of us that yes, indeed if we play around with this detail, this timeline, this interlocutor and so on and we maybe move the latter to a different place, time and context, well, everything just goes smoother.

Without the sour after-taste left in our mouths at every turn by criticism, by reproach, by dirty looks, life indeed becomes easier and (crazy, right?) other people benefit from it as well and they do not grow any less dedicated to their work, either. On the contrary, they often dive into work passionate hope the likes of which they have never felt before.

**Ethics do not equal morals:** indeed, this is an ever-underlying theme. Morals are aware of rules, and consequently, entail they must be followed. Ethics, however, pinpoint the responsibility of the individual, who must choose what to do with them.

In my wardrobe, I have a bag that says: IN EDEN, IT WASN'T SIN THAT WAS BORN ON THE DAY WHEN EVE PICKED AN APPLE, WHAT WAS BORN THAT DAY WAS A SPLENDID VIRTUE CALLED DISOBEDIENCE.

If we cannot ask ourselves, in all seriousness, how we intend to apply these principles, whatever happened to our ethics? Rules apply to general, if not generic, situations: life principles, the principles of social coexistence are more or less outlined, already.

Yet, it falls to each of us to choose how to use them, on a case-by-case basis. If, and how, and to what extent we should break them, if we must.

Not just for the sake of being foolishly difficult, but, in fact, to initiate innovation, to open unprecedented possibilities, to match up different interest and goals and make them compatible and reachable without betraying them.

After all, the Romans, who both invented and were great fans of rules, would say: *summum ius summa iniuria* (extreme law can create extreme injustice).

A rigidly applied law, not filtered through our conscientious evaluation, is bound to create injustice, utmost injustice indeed, precisely as it is inflicted in the name of the

law.

Injustice nobody will claim responsibility for, not to say, take the blame for. Which, therefore, can't be mended.

We often find ourselves forced to make decisions when our goals appear to take two different directions, when it is on us to paint a picture where they all fall into place, when it is up to us to establish a hierarchy of their worth and necessity.

The life we are to be the lead characters is not a predictable, familiar series of events, in that it is just like everyone else's.

That is because none of us is just simply "some guy", because Don Quixote's boldness in relating true and imaginary facts inextricably mixed together, is always intended to make it so that his interlocutor may make use of them: Don Quixote tells inconsistent stories so that the other party may make their decisions, may build their own timeline, may begin to ask themselves: "what if, instead...?".

Don Quixote's kindness is of a rare kind: ever dignified and genuine in madness and deceit, always listening attentively to what Sancho might need.

Learning, testing, knowing and learning to desire.

The case of Sancho's governorship is in its entirety emblematic: Don Quixote helps him out, counsels him, cheers for him, and it does not matter that the noblemen are merely attempting to make fun of them.

To the noblemen, it may just be make-believe, but Sancho is actually committed, because Sancho has become real.

And perhaps, the strongest feeling we are left with after reading *Don Quixote*, is utmost, fulfilling gratitude. The joy of being grateful is the highest point of, at long last, being fully grown up, independent, the lead characters of the life we are shaping for ourselves.

The gratitude that allows us to let Alonso Quijano go without the arrogance of reminding him that he has been (is) Don Quixote. The gratitude for, with him and thanks to him, having tried, experienced things, stumbled and hoped again, the gratitude for being alive.

# Illustrative Path

by Marcella Mallen

“Hi there, pretty lady, how about you make me some ten plates inspired by my *Don Quixote* in a very short time? The foreword is by Maria Cristina Koch... it’s coming out in late December...”

This is how, in early October, this journey through La Mancha with Beppe and Maria Cristina began. A new adventure for me, a writer rather than an illustrator, until then. Picture books meant for adults are a rarity, nowadays, except for what’s featured on the cover. Beppe, though, not only is an author who has many things to say, but also knows how to say them through a mix of genres and media, from music, through literature, to visual arts. He is a free, fiery soul. Alongside giving me very little time to consider whether I should take his offer, Beppe succeeded, with the help of Maria Cristina, in making me drop my resistance, armed only of irony and playfulness. In my opinion, the only infallible weapons to face a new challenge with a mix of recklessness and courage.

The three of us, after sharing so many chapters of our respective professional lives, immediately found ourselves exchanging ideas, feelings, jokes and gags throughout the whole time devoted to my new “job” as an illustrator in a chat displaying my first watercolor as the icon: Rocinante. A virtual environment that played a crucial role in picturing the exact portraits of the characters and the scenes drawn from the chapters we selected, in my mind.

I started with Rocinante and Dapple, Don Quixote and Sancho’s inseparable companions, capable of both carrying their weight and standing their attitude. The giraffe-like neck and the muzzle pointing up towards the sky are meant to turn the bony nag into the valiant horse the Don wishes for, same as the kind eyes and knowing smile of a country donkey make Dapple most suitable companion to Sancho’s rusticity.

Understanding the characters’ personality traits has taken much effort both research-wise and execution-wise: using colors like magenta and violet I emphasized the Don’s delirious insanity, which is portrayed in an almost mystical attitude, while strokes of

orange and ochre helped me convey Sancho's good nature. But how should one look at Dulcinea? Through the eyes of Don Quixote or Sancho? Princess or farmgirl? I depicted her in the spontaneous, familiar act of tying her headscarf at the back of her neck to shield herself from the La Mancha sun, her eyes full of shadows, as if inviting us to explore yet unknown paths.

Moving on to the scenes, after giving shape and feelings to the characters, was easier, even familiar, by that point.

Beginning with the first part of the work, I started with the opening chapter: *To Study, Perchance to Slack*. Alonso Quijano's transformation into Don Quixote happens right there in the library; the lopsided walls and the open ceiling room, where the moon appears surrounded by an unearthly halo, is the ideal backstage for the birth of the knight-errant.

The chapter titled *The Windmills* suggested to me a clean image, with the shadow of the knight on Rocinante reflected on the massive building, overshadowed by its mills and machines, a shot which evokes the spirit of the imminent fight against the giants.

The second part of the work, with the Don coming to his senses and his disenchantment, inspired me a more introspective interpretation of the character. His hat and shield laid down, the Don sleeps wrapped in a blanket, in an intricate, flaming forest. The strong chromatic contrast between the black knight and the autumn foliage of the trees stands for his solitary descent into the depths of consciousness. Going scorched earth is often necessary in all our lives, to find our way again.

After this self-confrontation, we find the Don on his feet, leaning on a parapet facing a silvery sea. In his shift, his spear and shield laid down, he appears as an intangible figure, ready to get off the playing field, but not before making Rocinante soar with the power of his mind. A dreamlike image almost, which links to the disenchantment of his return to reality with the still present attachment to the dream.

But could the visual tale end this way? Of course not, we agreed in our chat.

Who but Sancho, the loyal squire, the Don's confidant and motivator, already jokingly awarded the title of governor and proved himself worthy of the role, to take the baton? Thus, riding Dapple loaded with two bags full of the Don's books, after seizing the errant knight's spear and the shield, Sancho resumes the journey through the La Mancha cornfields, reaping everything he had the chance and came to learn during his path as "second" with his leader. Without even realizing it, Sancho himself becomes

the lead character and leader, giving all of us hope that we can get back to our feet after every fall or loss and move on to a better world. Without ever feeling defeated.

## Main cast



Rocinante



Dapple





Don Quixote





Sancio Panza



Aldonza Lorenzo

## The scenery

*You poor world, poor insufferable world  
This is too much, you stooped to low  
Too grey and too ugly  
Abominable world, listen  
A knight challenges you.*

J. Brel — *L'homme de la Mancha.*

Throughout the history of the world there have been many a men who have wondered how things could be, who didn't just stand idly by, who rolled up their sleeves and did what they could to put their vision into practice.

Perhaps there is one, an inspiration to some of these dreamers, to be rightfully considered a treasure of the human race, someone fictional, who never existed, a literary character who didn't much like the world he lived in and, instead of making it bar talk, imagined a better world, and tried making it reality riding his nag. A character who entered collective consciousness to the point that, even if you've never read the novel by Miguel de Cervantes or any adaptation of his work, never watched a movie or a play based on him, never listened to songs about his adventures made of twists and turns, defeats and the victories, merely saying his name brings to mind, on the one hand, the daily challenge that is life, and, often, the helplessness against power and bureaucracy, and, on the other hand, his tragicomic misadventures; his very name, Don Quixote de La Mancha, evokes thoughts of journeys, dreams, great beliefs. In his adventures, he meets hundreds of characters who make fun of him because of his idealism, of his world view and, at certain times, you wish were there to defend this naive madman, you wish you could split his head open to get his quest, his running around righting wrongs and making the world a better place to live in, off it. Is it madness? Or is it heroism? In any case, Don Quixote wouldn't have endured over four hundred years, as an inspiration to other dreamers, if it hadn't been for his underlying, authentic sense of beauty, the aesthetic vision of a world only a fool wouldn't live in. That's right, there's a big difference between being mad and being a fool. Fyodor

Dostoevsky sees Don Quixote as one of the two pivotal characters in human history, the other being Jesus; indeed, in his work *A Writer's Diary*, we read:

And if the world came to an end and people were asked somewhere there: "Well, did you understand anything from your life on earth and draw any conclusion from it?" a person could silently hand over *Don Quixote*.

Considering Don Quixote to be a madman based on his action is simply short-sighted. In fact, he is not governed by passion and is not incapable of reasoning, on the contrary, in many occasion he acts wisely, as clever man of learning. Don Quixote is even too rational, in the sense that he wholeheartedly follows the rules he himself has established: the general laws of knight-errantry. Problem is the laws he has chosen as his own rules of conduct lead him to associate, to some specific events, meanings they don't hold for other people. Which is not so different a position from that we find ourselves in everyday, forced to follow the rules regardless of what they mean, and we don't call ourselves madmen for that. We accept these rules not without cause, but without reason. Many speak of Don Quixote as the incarnation of the modern man, in the sense that the modern man follows the rules without much questioning, that is, without making sure they give rise to the right choices and true beliefs.



Indeed it is I, Don Quixote,  
Lord of La Mancha  
Always in the service of honor,  
As I have the honor to be me  
Fearless Don Quixote,  
And the wind of history sings inside me

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Management literature is full of works by “classic” authors, centered on the art of “war” and leadership, so to speak, in battle. Education is increasingly reduced to a mere instrument of the job market, where students are encouraged to adopt and spread standards and patterns widely established in the business world. Patterns that leave no room to dreams, to thinking different, but instead even everything out, driven by the pursuit of success and goals. Within this framework, a modern Martin Luther King, instead of starting his speech with the famous “**I have a dream**”, would likely settle for “**I have a goal**”, thereby kissing the fight against segregation goodbye. The again,

people talking about a shared dream is hard to find: it's no surprise that, even if you listen to couples, we have gone from "Me and my wife share a dream" to "me and my wife have plans together". Words makes a difference. Excellence is merely reduced to devising solutions, therefore, it's tangible, concrete actions that lead to success. The same goes for the book-market. And whether you sell soap bars or hand grenades, and it doesn't make much difference, so long as you sell a lot and the goods leave the seller as soon as possible: the shame of obsolete stocks symbolizes failure.

Don Quixote has no such thoughts, if anything, failure after failure, he persists in following his dream, working hard to achieve it. He perseveres because he knows who he is! It is precisely this self-awareness that can help us figure out modern leadership.

Don Quixote is, therefore:

- an **allegory** for the struggle between pragmatism and idealism;
- a journey between **madness** and **reality**;
- an ongoing, deep **discussion** on the topic of human existence;
- a **journey** through "near-wins", within that realm where failures are the means to achieve true skill. The only way to reach it, in fact, is going through failure, becoming something of an expert at moving in the dark.

We follow Don Quixote not because we think of him as leader in a purely and sadly modern sense, but because he teaches us, he guides us and, like a lighthouse, sheds light on at least the four following key aspects of leadership, meaning:

- **the role played by imagination**, of a vision (how to use it, how to sustain it over time, how to move between reality and imagination). Imagination is more important than knowledge, Albert Einstein would say;
- **commitment** (how to fuel it and ensure consistency with your dream, how to react in the face of failure, how to turn persistence into a value);
- **joy** (how to enjoy the pleasures of life, not the temporary ones, but the happiness that comes from the soul such us, indeed, the joy and pleasure in doing things, how to have fun);
- **the ongoing quest** for the "stars", the impossible dream, big or small.

Aspects which don't entirely lie in technical expertise, as most leadership classes would



have us believe; it's not about handling power, it's about being competent in every facet of human life; we need not picture a world that fosters security, measure and consensus through quick-fix solutions, but one that encourages our tenacious attempt to find the answer, together with the Don, to the three following questions:

- How do you justify chasing victory when victory is so elusive?
- Why be virtuous when virtue can't be rewarded?
- How can we see the light through the darkness of failure??

These questions may lead either to a standstill (why do anything if the end-result is determined by chance?) or to cynicism (why fight for a better world if we can't know the consequences of our actions for sure?). We find the answers in Cervantes' work, as Don Quixote's is a story of passion, of method, of profound self-awareness. At the end of the day, it's a story about the human soul steering between fervor and discipline, with the certainty that, to face our dream world, to enter it and try making it better, all we need is sneaking out the side door at dawn, in secret, with no one but ourselves and our horse. It's a challenge to life itself! We don't need sensational announcements and big words, just to live our life doing something everyday, guided by the certainty of who we are, always keeping in mind the Don's words: "I know who I am" and "Sloth [...] never reached the conclusion demanded by good intentions". And let us reevaluate Sancho, who is not just a servant but the embodiment of common sense (Aristotle's practical wisdom), the jester who must be in the head of supposedly great men, and in our heads, too, whatever task we are called to fulfill.

Don Quixote has the overconfidence of the self-aware individual possessed by a burning love, something that makes his detractors so jealous. He is cocky to the point that he doesn't give a damn about failing and getting beaten up so long as he can "play" the model of the imperfect knight, not the perfect mercenary, for others.

On the other hand, we can say we are forgetting to live if:

- we only believe in something when it's convenient;
- we only love when our love is requited;
- we only learn when learning is profitable;
- we only work hard when success is guaranteed;
- if we are ashamed of failure.

Then, we indeed are mercenaries, just like that one, the one you see when you look in the mirror. And as you look at yourself, you can hear Luigi Tenco's words in *Un giorno dopo l'altro* (*A day after the other*) playing in the background of your life.



My eyes look around for  
The future we dreamed about  
But dreams are still dreams  
and the future is halfway past.

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At this point, why not framing and hanging the satirical manifesto by Evil Supply, which reads: BE THE VILLAIN YOU WERE BORN TO BE. STOP WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO COME ALONG & CORRUPT YOU. SUCCUMB TO THE DARKNESS YOURSELF. On the web page where the print is sold, the advert continues: “We support the full range of villainy — follow your nightmares. Be your own villain, plot your own nefarious path”.

The great Tiziano Scavi, creator and father of Dylan Dog, offers these words about society and the values it conveys: “A system that doesn't give work to young people, but instead provides them with an education in the false myths of money, luxury cars and designer clothing<sup>[1]</sup>”. If these are the values, if this is the quest, there is little room left for dreams, there only goal is to run with the crowd. This message is so idiotic that Jovanotti's verse *à la Fantozzi*<sup>[2]</sup> about building “one big church that begins with Che Guevara and ends with Mother Teresa” has its own unbelievable appeal.

In any case, there has been a time in the life of most of us when we wanted to become knights: to live adventures, to impress our woman (or our man?), to pass a thousand tests and be rewarded with enduring fame, to ourselves the recipient of great beliefs and values such as freedom, equality, kindness. Whatever happened to this dream?



Very often, especially as adults, we find ourselves wondering about how our life could be, compared with the one we actually have and live everyday: the so called “real life”. Those who try crossing the line between real and imaginary life are those who follow their dream. Wishing for something means wishing to see something more than what we have now, and it's precisely your wish to achieve your dream that compels you to cross that line; otherwise, if you are afraid of the future, you stay put as you are. You stay on this side and all you can do is calling those who follow their dreams instead, madmen. In any case, there is something quite reassuring: at any given time in your lifetime, you can cross that line; you can, always, at any moment, take your tools and put them to their best use to build something for yourself as well as others’.

In *Nostalgia* (1983), the last masterpiece by Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, the lead character, madman Domenico, straddling the statue of Marcus Aurelius in Piazza del Campidoglio, delivers a beautiful monologue perhaps authored by poet Tonino Guerra.

I can't live simultaneously in my head and in my body. That's why I can't be just one person. I can feel within myself countless things at once. There are no great masters left. That's the real evil of our time. The heart's path is covered in shadow. We must listen to the voices that seem useless in brains full of long sewage pipes of school wall, tarmac and welfare papers. The buzzing of insects must enter. We must fill the eyes and ears of all of us with things that are the beginning of a great dream. [...] What kind of world is this if a madman tells you you must be ashamed of yourselves! [...] And now, some music...



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[1] T. SCLAVI, *Dyland Dog, Caccia alle streghe (Witch Hunt)*, n. 69, page 29.

[2] Translator's note: Ugo Fantozzi is a fictional character, appearing in Italian literature and film, created by Paolo Villaggio. A hapless accountant tortured by society, he is an extravagant exaggeration of customs and habits of Italy's lower middle class. [source: Wikipedia]