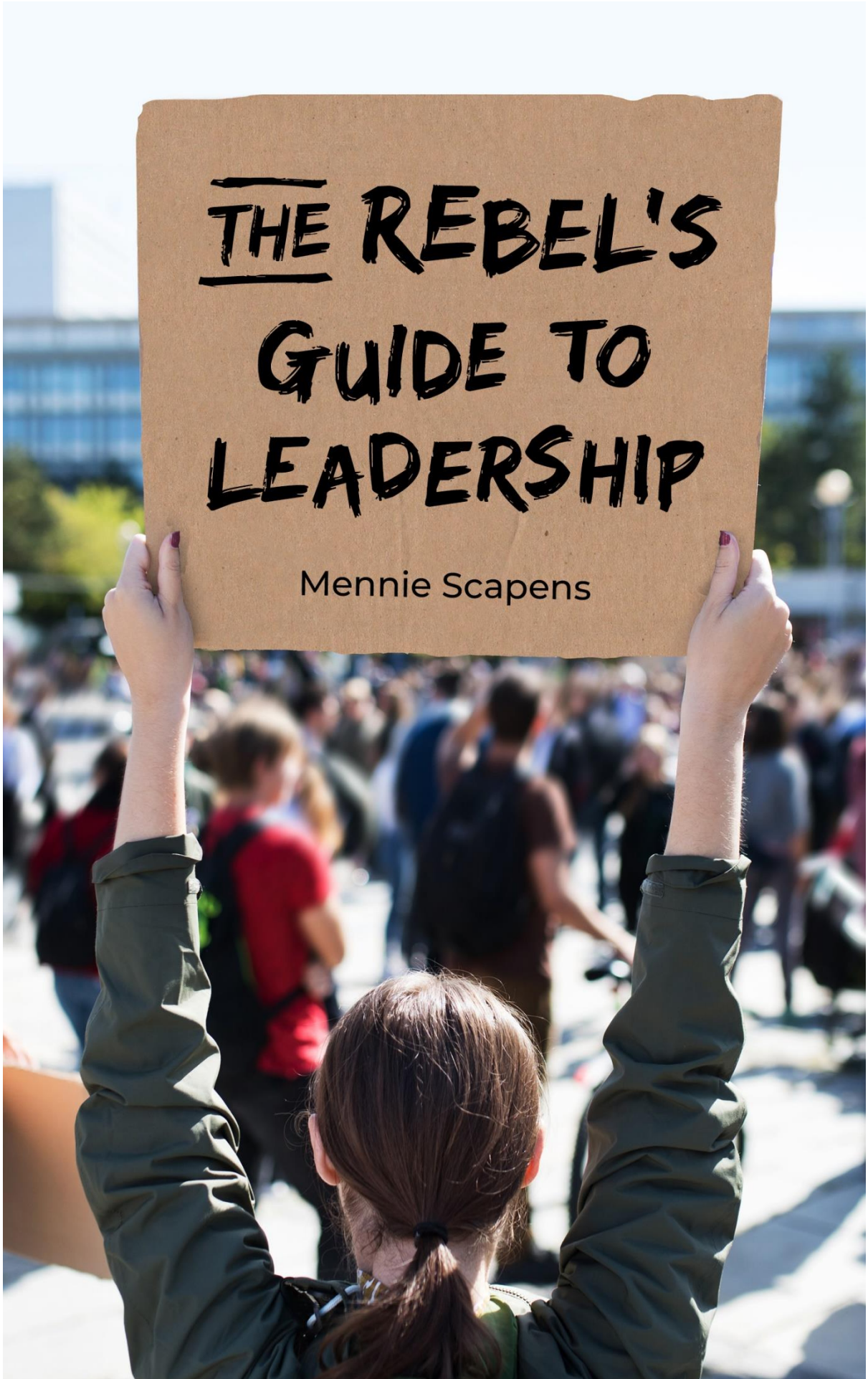


THE REBEL'S
GUIDE TO
LEADERSHIP

Mennie Scapens



The Rebel's Guide to Leadership

Mennie Scapens

© 2020 by Mennie Scapens

398 Snodgrass Road

RD4

Tauranga

New Zealand

Email: scapens@xtra.co.nz

This book is copyright. Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design by aliceberrydesign.com

Gratitudes

With deep gratitude to my former colleagues at Matahui School, now life-long friends – Robin Burt, Christine Croskery, Lea Dunham, Brian Miller, Pauline Miller, Erin Pidduck, Alison Sewter and Kate Stagg. I have so many joyful memories of our time together creating Matahui magic.

Remembering with love and gratitude our inspirational art teacher (who also happened to be my mother-in-law), Pat Scapens, and music teacher, Len Buchanan. Pat and Len were the inspiration behind our schoolwide art and music programs which became second to none.

Deep gratitude also to Parker Palmer, the Center for Courage & Renewal, and my friends and colleagues in our global collaboration of facilitators – such a wise and generous community. The ‘life’s work’ I began at Matahui School continues today with my Courage & Renewal work.

And special thanks to my daughter Georgia Scapens for her help and support with editing, book design and inspiration along the way.

The Rebel's Guide to Leadership: Contents

- Chapter 1: The makings of a rebel
- Chapter 2: Rebels have a cause. So what's yours?
- Chapter 3: Do you have the courage to lead the way?
- Chapter 4: Getting real – know yourself, be yourself
- Chapter 5: Begin with trust
- Chapter 6: Leader as learner
- Chapter 7: Leading together – the self-management revolution
- Chapter 8: Depend on diversity – rebel leadership and the theory of multiple intelligences
- Chapter 9: The potential of paradox
(or how to transform either-or thinking)
- Chapter 10: How to cope in a compliance crazy culture
- Chapter 11: Resisting the culture of busyness
(or how to beat burnout)
- Chapter 12: Leading from the emerging future
(or what to do when the shit hits the fan)
- Epilogue: And now the shit really has hit the fan
(lessons from a global pandemic)

Reading List: books that inspire and inform rebel leadership

About Mennie Scapens

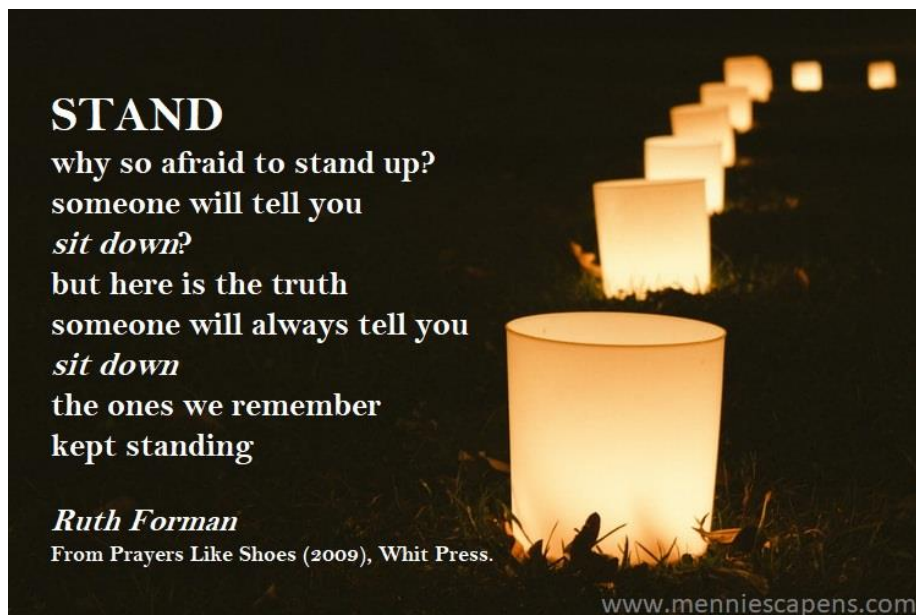
1. The makings of a rebel

Are you a changemaker with the courage to take a stand on what you believe to be true and right?

Are there things happening in your life, your workplace, your community or the world at large that you want to help shake up and change for the better?

Do you have the courage to take a stand against popular opinion to help make that change happen?

If this sounds like you, if you're a person who feels called to do your bit to help create a more compassionate, just and sustainable world, then please keep reading...



How I became a Rebel

This was never part of my life plan.

In fact, more than once I've wished I could just go along with the status quo and accept things the way they are. Life would be simpler and would require much less effort and heartache.

But as a young mother my rebel heart was roused when I began to question the lack of schooling options for our daughter Carly, as she approached school age.

Then it wouldn't let me sit back and watch as Carly began to fade away in the large, urban primary school she had to attend. I say, 'had to', because this was the only school available in our rural community. Carly was quiet, bright and sensitive, and she and the school were not a good fit. It didn't take long for things to go wrong, and for my initial concerns to grow into full-blown fears for her future.

Never get in the way of a fearful mother, they say, of any species.

Not that I became a rebel overnight. This was a three-stage affair.

Stage 1: Rousing the Rebel's Heart

Carly's wellbeing and future began to take front seat in my life. Worries and fear are like that. They fuel themselves. My initial response was to become more involved at her school. I began to observe and question how things were done. I also began to study child development and learning, which led to lots more questions about what was and wasn't happening at school for Carly. My teacher's heart was emerging.

At this point you may be thinking that I was one of those helicopter parents who never thinks things are good enough for their kid. The truth is that sometimes things aren't good enough and they need to be changed, and if it takes a worried parent to spark that transformation, then so be it. And sometimes the things that parents do for their own kids go on to benefit lots of kids.

Unfortunately, the school came to label me in this way – as a 'pushy parent' – a damaging label I've since seen attached to many interested and involved (and sometimes worried) parents. Judging parents like this doesn't help. It creates defensiveness and destroys effective home/school partnerships. It certainly pushed me down the road towards rebellion.

Stage 2: Raising the Rebel Flag

This is when I took a stand and announced my decision to withdraw Carly from school to homeschool her. I'd done a lot of research into homeschooling, but this was a big step into the unknown. It took a lot of courage and soul-

searching. But by now, I was very worried, approaching desperate. I had lost all faith that the school was able to provide for Carly's needs, and I had three younger kids at home to think about. I felt it was up to me to find a solution.

Raising the rebel flag was an important step in starting my movement against the status quo in education. It let people know I was seriously dissatisfied and planned to do something about it. More importantly, it invited a response. Were people with me or against?

The response from the school was immediate and predictable. They felt the proposed withdrawal of Carly would be perceived as their failure, so voila! my concerns were finally listened to, and Carly's situation was investigated, resulting in the immediate creation of a weekly half-hour language extension class for gifted students led by the principal himself. It was a start. But a short-lived band-aid that lasted for all of one term.

But my rebel flag received an unexpected response from a teacher at the school, Chris Hobart, who I knew personally. She called me at home.

"Don't do anything rash," she advised. "I'm going to look into Carly's situation."

Chris may not have realized that she was now stepping into rebel territory herself. Teachers are usually loath to question what's happening in other teachers' classrooms. Ethically, it's frowned upon, so teachers prefer to keep their heads down and focus on what's happening in their own classrooms.

But the very next evening Chris phoned back. I remember her exact words.

"You're right," she said. "You have a very real problem."

Stage 3: Launching the rebel movement

While it was reassuring to know I wasn't such a crazy, pushy parent after all, Chris had highlighted the urgency of Carly's situation. Carly had just turned seven. Kids usually only get one go at education, and it's very difficult to undo the negative attitudes that come about from an unhappy start to school life.

But now Chris had put on her parent's hat too. She was beginning to question whether her own 3-year old would be able to thrive in this large urban school, which as I've said, was the only school available to our rural children. She called me again.

"Instead of homeschooling," she said, "what would you think about setting up our own school?"

And that's how it all began.



A fledgling rebel movement won't get off the ground without followers. If you haven't heard about the importance of the first follower, here's a great [link](#) worth checking out. Chris was the first follower in our fledgling rebel movement and her involvement was vital. As a respected teacher in our community, she brought credibility and momentum to our movement to create an alternative school. Without her, I would most likely have embarked on a homeschooling venture with my own kids and headed in a completely different direction.

But eight months later, in February 1988, we opened the doors of [Matahui School](#) (originally Matahui Road School), with a full roll of 24 students.

Chris was teaching principal, we employed a second teacher, and I contributed my skills in community building, communications, and marketing. Our guiding philosophy was simple. We were committed to providing a small rural

school with small class sizes for our children. We aimed to meet their individual and differing needs and while much has changed and developed at Matahui over the past 30 years, the founding mission remains the same:

**To foster in all students
high self-esteem, creativity and a love of learning
in a caring family environment.**

Out of necessity Matahui School was established as an independent fee-paying school. We had explored with interested parents the possibility of creating a community-owned school, but it was going to take too long, and time was of the essence for our own children. Chris had suitable land available, a local organization was selling off a two-classroom building for \$12,000, we purchased a surplus toilet block from the Glenbrook Steel Mill for \$8,000, our husbands helped prepare the school site, and together we rolled up our sleeves and made it all happen. Apart from the cost of the land, I think there would have been plenty of change out of \$40,000 for the original establishment cost.

So Matahui wasn't your traditional independent school. From the outset, we encouraged a diverse school community by keeping fees as low as possible, keeping teachers' salaries low, and making use of Government-funded positions for low-income families when these were available. But lack of accessibility for many children was always a personal source of regret.

Co-founding Matahui School set me on a learning and leadership journey that I now refer to as "my life's work". In 1995 Chris stepped back from the school due to health reasons and I stepped in to prevent the school from closing. Under-qualified and unconventional, but with the backing of a team of experienced and passionate teachers, we embarked on an exciting learning journey over the following ten years that encompassed Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, developing thinking skills and intelligent dispositions, values education, the importance of the arts and education outside the classroom, and much, much more.

By the time I stepped back from my role, the school had reached its maximum roll of 100 students with 6 teachers, 4 teaching assistants, specialist art and

music teachers, and a wonderful school community of dedicated and involved families. The school was recognized at the leading edge in New Zealand education and we had managed all this while maintaining some of the smallest class sizes and lowest tuition fees in New Zealand.

What began as my personal rebel mission to provide for my own children's education and wellbeing led to the creation of a respected independent primary school with a strong record of preparing resilient, creative and caring students who are well equipped to thrive in our rapidly changing world.

Along the way I became a respected educator and school leader. A career highlight was the opportunity to attend Project Zero, a multiple intelligences symposium at Harvard University, made possible by an Independent Schools of New Zealand principal's scholarship.

In 2006 I attempted to take my rebellion beyond the primary school system, to work alongside four secondary school teachers in a year-long action research project, investigating the possibilities of bringing the Matahui way to the secondary school system.

The reasons this rebellion didn't get off the ground were many, and are outlined in my Master of Education thesis, which went on to be published as [*Conflicting Beliefs: The theory of multiple intelligences in the junior secondary school*](#). It was an exciting learning journey, one I wouldn't have missed for the world, but my vision and energy could no longer sustain it. Burnout is a very real risk associated with passionate leadership, an issue I address in Chapter 11.

So why am I telling you all this?

Because I believe the life and leadership lessons I've learned and continue to learn along my unconventional rebel's journey are very relevant to the volatile and unpredictable world we now live in.

The time for traditional authoritarian, hierarchical leadership practices is past for they create ego-centred organizations in which fear, distrust and discontent flourish. Open-hearted, trustworthy and visionary leadership is needed today. We need leaders who have the courage to question the status quo and

experiment with new ways of being and doing. Leaders who are comfortable with uncertainty and with not knowing all the answers. Leaders who invite others to step into their leadership, who trust in the inherent goodness and capabilities of others and nurture their gifts and passions. Leaders who walk their talk, whose deepest values are reflected in their leadership.

If the idea of 'leadership' doesn't sit comfortably with you, then please consider Meg Wheatley's definition of a leader as '*anyone who is willing to help*'. Right now, the world needs people who have the courage to step up and help change things for the better. Does this sound like you? Do you have a rebel flag you'd like to raise, or perhaps you've already done so?

"I have realized that the real role of a leader is not to control but to midwife – to evoke those qualities of commitment, compassion, generosity and creativity that are in all of us to start with."

*– Margaret Wheatley, *Courage Starts With Uncertainty*, 2018.*

We are living in a time of great disconnection from each other, from our shared humanity and our environment. Our western culture's focus on measurable outcomes, outward achievements, affluence, and appearance mean many of us have become disconnected from our own hearts and to what matters most deeply to us in life. We wonder at the sense of emptiness we feel, which despite all the outer trappings of privileged lives, we cannot satisfy.

I feel called to help heal this disconnection – to use my gifts and resources to help people find ways to (re)connect more deeply with themselves, with others and our shared humanity, with Nature and with the great inter-connected mystery that is life. In helping people realize and live into their gifts and dreams and the work that calls to them in the world, by empowering them to step into their leadership, the 'life's work' I began at Matahui School continues.

In writing *The Rebel's Guide to Leadership*, I'm raising my rebel's flag. I'm taking a stand and I'm inviting you to raise yours.

- *What rouses your rebel's heart?*
- *What do you want to help change for the better?*
- *What dreams, passions, skills and knowledge drive you to want to do this?*

REFERENCES

"Stand" from *Prayers Like Shoes* by Ruth Forman. Copyright © 2009 by Ruth Forman.
Reprinted with permissions of the author and publisher.