In *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*, Steven Sample uses ten themes to convey what he styles as "contrarian leadership." According to Sample, contrarian leadership means "breaking free of the bonds of conventional thinking" to become a free-thinking leader (Sample, 2002, p.15). The Contrarian Perspective is not about countering all conventional wisdom; it is simply about finding a leadership style that suits the individual. Sample cites that leadership is something that can be taught and learned with time and knowledge, and that great leadership is "largely situational and contingent" (Sample, 2002, p. 3). According to Sample, a contrarian leader is mindful of thinking gray and free, artful listening, experts, books, how decisions are made, their core values and ethical beliefs, whom they work for, how to create a following, and what it ultimately means to be a leader.

**Chapter 1: Thinking Gray, and Free**
- Thinking Gray: Do not form an opinion about a matter until you have heard all the relevant facts and arguments, or until circumstances force you to form an opinion.
- There is an underestimation of how much time one has to form a judgment. Figure out the appropriate pace for when a decision needs to be made.
- One may not need to make a decision at all.
"… contrarian wisdom argue that, for leaders, judgments as to the truth or falsity of information or the merits of new ideas should be arrived at as slowly and subtly as possible—and in many cases not at all" (Sample, 2002, p. 7).

**Chapter 2: Artful Listening**
- It is powerful to listen without making a judgment. This process of artful listening is about acquiring new ideas and gathering and assessing information.
- Active listening is about asking questions, being intensely interested, gathering information without biases, and holding the speaker accountable.
- Listening Gray is absorbing stories, reports, complaints, posturings, accusations, extravagant claims, and prejudices without immediately offering a definitive response.

**Chapter 3: Experts: Saviors and Charlatans**
- It is important to keep in mind that experts may not always act in the best interest of your objectives, but for their own ego.
- There is a rising blend of science and technology, so it is important for leaders to understand both, and recognize how social and natural sciences are different.
- Leaders who are most effective do not rely too heavily on experts.
  "… it's not important whether a particular scientific theory is really 'true' in some ultimate sense; rather, what counts to leaders are the practical technologies that can be wrung from that theory" (Sample, 2002, p. 45).

**Chapter 4: You Are What You Are Read**
- Supertexts are books that have withstood the test of time and that continue to influence leaders and the world we live in, often times, in ways we may not even realize.
- Supertexts are not infallible, but they aid in giving us timeless truths about human nature, and a common language to speak about leadership and human nature.
- It is important for leaders to make a conscious decision about what to read. Choosing a book with discretion enables the individual to maintain his/her intellectual independence.

**Chapter 5: Decisions, Decisions**
-   The long-term effects of his or her decisions gauge a leader's importance.
-   There are two rules:

(1) Instill trust in lieutenants and to allow them to grow; this enables the organization to function without the leader because the lieutenants will be competent enough to run the organization in the leader's absence. Leaders do not have to make every decision.

(2) Using artful procrastination is the valuable because by waiting, you have more time to receive new information. However, this may also result in a loss of opportunities.

-   Leaders must know whether or not they have the authority to make a decision.

**Chapter 6: Give the Devils His Due**
-   Machiavelli believed that leaders should not be hated, but that they should be feared or loved (preferably feared). A leader should never humiliate an opponent unless they are prepared to be hated and no longer want to have a positive relationship with that person.
-   People are capable of a lot of behaviors. A leader should be realistic in what people are like, not what he or she wishes people to be.

"…people are more likely to take advantage of a leader who is only loved than they are one who is feared…" (Sample, 2002, p. 98).

**Chapter 7: Know Which Hill You're Willing to Die on**
-   Effective leaders are easier to spot. It is harder to spot exclusively good or bad leaders since it is important to examine their ethical framework.
-   Once you know which hill you are willing to die on, keep it to yourself since other people may take advantage of your stance.

"Ethical leadership requires that the leader choose one set of moral values over all others, and then take full responsibility for his actions based on those values" (Sample, 2002, p. 119).

**Chapter 8: Work for Those Who Work For You**
-   Leaders should be the first assistants for their chief lieutenants.
-   In hiring, it is a mistake to define the responsibilities of a position and try to find a person to match the job. Instead, the leader should find competent and talented people, and then assign the roles.
-   Surround yourself with a diverse set of people who are smarter than you.

"Contrarian leaders know that it's great people, not great job descriptions, that make an organization successful" (Sample, 2002, p. 125).

**Chapter 9: Follow the Leader**
-   Effective leaders sell his or herself first, and then the product, policies or vision.
-   Effective leaders create, manipulate, and exemplify stories, symbols, slogans, and mantras as well. These define the essence of the leader's vision and his character.

**Chapter 10: Being President vs. Doing President**
-   70/30 Rule: 30% is spent on substantial matters and 70% is doing something trivial, routine, or ephemeral. However, anything worth doing is worth doing well.