



Leadership Gold

By John Maxwell

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The Leadership Gold Principles

1. If It's Lonely at the Top, You're Not Doing Something Right

“loneliness is not a positional issue; it is a personality issue.”

Think about it. If you're all alone, that means nobody is following you. And if nobody is following you, you're not really leading! Few leaders are successful unless a lot of people want them to be. No leaders are successful without a few people helping them. Sadly, as soon as some leaders arrive at the top, they spend their time trying to push others off the top. They play king of the hill because of their insecurity or competitiveness. That may work for a time, but it usually won't last long. When your goal is to knock others down, you spend too much of your time and energy watching out for people who would do the same to you.

A leader's credibility begins with personal success. It ends with helping others achieve personal success. To gain credibility, you must consistently demonstrate three things:

1. Initiative: You have to get up to go up.
2. Sacrifice: You have to give up to go up.
3. Maturity: You have to grow up to go up.

“If you are in a leadership position, do not rely on your title to convince people to follow you. Build relationships. Win people over. Do that and you will never be a lonely leader.”

2. The Toughest Person to Lead Is Always Yourself

When we are foolish, we want to conquer the world. When we are wise, we want to conquer ourselves. That begins when we do what we should no matter how we feel about it. “Leading yourself well means that you hold yourself to a higher standard of accountability than others do. Why? Because you are held responsible not only for your own actions, but also for those of the people you lead. Leadership is a trust, not a right. For that reason, we must “fix” ourselves earlier than others may be required to. We must always seek to do what's right, no matter how high we rise or how powerful we become. It's a struggle we never outgrow.

3. Defining Moments Define Your Leadership

Most days in our lives come and go; they are much like all the others and don't stand out. But there are a few days that are unlike all the others. They do stand out because they give us an opportunity to stand up, be set apart from the rest of the crowd, and seize that moment—or to remain sitting with the rest of the crowd and let it pass. These moments—for better or worse—define us. They show us what we are really made of. “Leaders become better leaders when they experience a defining moment and respond to it correctly.”

4. When You Get Kicked in the Rear, You Know You're out in Front

Many times, when a leader is being criticized, it's really the leadership position that prompts the negative remarks, not the individual leader. You need to be able to separate the two, and you can do that only when you know yourself. If a criticism is directed at the position, don't take it personally. Let it roll off of you. Knowing yourself well may take some time and effort.



To be the best person you can be—and the best leader—you need to be yourself. That doesn't mean that you aren't willing to grow and change. It just means that you work to become the best you that you can be.

5. Never Work a Day in Your Life

To most people, there's a big difference between work and play. Work is what they have to do to earn a living so that someday they can do what they want to do. Don't live your life that way! Choose to do what you love and make the necessary adjustments to make it work in your life.

***“When a person doesn't have passion, life can become pretty monotonous.
Everything is a “have to” and nothing is a “want to.”***

6. The Best Leaders Are Listeners

When leaders listen to followers and use what they hear to make improvements that benefit those who speak up and the organization, then followers put their trust in those leaders. When leaders do the opposite—when they fail to listen—it damages the leader-follower relationship. When followers no longer believe that their leaders are listening to them, they start looking for someone who will.

7. Get in the Zone and Stay There

Whenever you see people who are successful in their work, you can rest assured that they are working in their strength zone. But that's not enough if you want to be successful as a leader. Good leaders help others find their strength zones and empower them to work in them. In fact, the best leaders are characterized by the ability to recognize the special abilities and limitations of others, and the capacity to fit their people into the jobs where they will do best.

8. A Leader's First Responsibility Is to Define Reality

As leaders, what we do—or don't do—always has consequences. We can try to maintain an unrealistic outlook or lifestyle, but someday we will have to pay a realistic price for it. There is no avoiding it.

Continually cast a realistic eye on . . .

The Situation—it is often worse than you think.

The Process—it usually takes longer than you think.

The Price—it always costs more than you think.

You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.

9. To See How the Leader Is Doing, Look at the People

People often attribute the success of organizations and teams to many things: opportunities, the economy, personnel, teamwork, resources, timing, chemistry, luck. And while it's true that any of those things can come into play, the one thing all good organizations have in common is good leadership.

When leaders are healthy, the people they lead tend to be healthy. When leaders are unhealthy, so are their followers. People may teach what they know, but they reproduce what they are.

***“Good leaders inspire their followers to have confidence in them.
But great leaders inspire their followers to have confidence in themselves.”***

10. Don't Send Your Ducks to Eagle School

Eagles don't want to hang around with ducks. They don't want to live in a barnyard or swim in a pond. Their potential makes them impatient with those who cannot soar. People who are used to moving fast and flying high are easily frustrated by people who want to hold them back.



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***“The more you know about leadership,
the easier it will be to recognize a leader when you see one.”***

11. Keep Your Mind on the Main Thing

Every leader is busy. The question for every leader is not, will my calendar be full? The question is, who will fill my calendar? If you don't take charge of your schedule, others will always be in charge of you.

“Half of being smart is knowing what you are dumb at.”

12. Your Biggest Mistake Is Not Asking What Mistake You're Making

There are two common responses people have concerning failure. While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes, learning from them, and becoming superior. People can either run from mistakes and hurt themselves, or they learn from them and help themselves. People who try to avoid failure at all costs never learn and end up repeating the same mistakes over and over again. But those who are willing to learn from their failures never have to repeat them again.

“Good people are good because they have come to wisdom through failure.

We get very little wisdom from success.” – William Saroyan

If you lead people, then you need to give them permission to ask hard questions and push back against your ideas. That permission must be given to others by the leader. Too often leaders would rather have followers who turn a blind eye instead of ones who speak with a blunt tongue. But if all is quiet when decisions are being considered, it probably won't be quiet after it plays out.

13. Don't Manage Your Time—Manage Your Life

Nothing separates successful people from unsuccessful people more than how they use their time. Successful people understand that time is the most precious commodity on earth. As a result, they know where their time goes. They continually analyze how they are using their time and ask themselves the question, “Am I getting the best use out of my time?”

“Time is the most valuable coin in your life. You and you alone will determine how that coin will be spent.

Be careful that you do not let other people spend it for you.” – Carl Sandburg

14. Keep Learning to Keep Leading

Contrary to popular belief, the greatest obstacle to discovery isn't ignorance or lack of intelligence. It's the illusion of knowledge. One of the great dangers of life is believing that you have arrived. If that happens to you, you're done growing.

“What kind of attitude do you have when it comes to learning? I've observed that people fall into one of these categories. They live in one of three zones:

The Challenge Zone: “I attempt to do what I haven't done before.”

The Comfort Zone: “I do what I already know I can do.”

The Coasting Zone: “I don't even do what I've done before.”

The average person will try to pull down anyone around him who is working to rise above average. The road to success is uphill all the way, and most people are not willing to pay the price. Many people would rather deal with old problems than find new solutions.

15. Leaders Distinguish Themselves During Tough Times



If the path were clear and smooth, it wouldn't be a tough call. And anyone could make it! In addition, any tough call you make will be questioned. It will be criticized. It will carry with it certain consequences. That's why it's a tough call.

One of the keys to being prepared for your finest hour is to make the tough calls in the smaller minutes that precede it. You have to be willing to do the small things, the difficult things, the unseen things. They prepare you for the major difficulties. If you aren't willing to take care of the little difficulties, don't expect to be able to rise up to meet the big ones. But if you do well with the small ones, you will be able to distinguish yourself during the big ones. That is where you will earn your reputation.

16. People Quit People, Not Companies

Building and maintaining trust as a leader is a matter of integrity and communication. If you don't want people to quit you, you need to be consistent, open, and truthful with them.

17. Experience Is Not the Best Teacher

Some people learn and grow as a result of their experience; some people don't. Everybody has some kind of experience. It's what you do with that experience that matters.

Jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The young man knows the rules, but the old man knows the exceptions." That is true only when the old man has taken the time to evaluate his experiences and gain wisdom from them.

18. The Secret to a Good Meeting Is the Meeting Before the Meeting

Anyone who has spent a lot of time in meetings knows that a meeting may take minutes, but it usually wastes hours. And anytime the outcome of a meeting is to have another meeting, you know you're in trouble.

After serving on various committees and attending many meetings, Harry Chapman wrote up a list of rules to help him deal with the issue:

- Never arrive on time: this stamps you as beginner.
- Don't say anything until the meeting is over: this stamps you as being wise.
- Be as vague as possible: this avoids irritating others.
- When in doubt, suggest that a subcommittee be appointed.
- Be the first to move for adjournment: this will make you popular—it's what everyone is waiting for.

Intelligence is no substitute for information. Enthusiasm is no substitute for capacity. Willingness is no substitute for experience. A meeting is no substitute for progress.

19. Be a Connector, Not Just a Climber

Climbers are always acutely aware of who is ahead of them and who is behind them in the standings or on the organizational chart. They are the way I was as a young leader—reading the reports to see where they rank. Moving up is very important, and the idea of moving down is terrible. Connectors, on the other hand, are focused on moving over to where other people are. They think more about who is on the journey with them and how they can come alongside them.

20. The Choices You Make, Make You

If you want to know who people are, don't look at their résumés. Don't listen to what they say. Just watch what choices they make.

Writer and professor C. S. Lewis observed, "Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you—the part that chooses—into something a little different than what it was before. Taking your life as a



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whole, with all your innumerable choices, you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature.”

“It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” – J.K. Rowlings

21. Influence Should Be Loaned but Never Given

Influence should never be given to others; it should only be loaned! It’s like an investment, and you should expect a return. Just like a financial investment, when there isn’t a good return, you should invest elsewhere. Only a fool sends good money after bad.

22. For Everything You Gain, You Give Up Something

To be an excellent leader, I think you have to learn to travel light. You must learn to off-load before trying to reload. You have to let go of one thing in order to grasp a new one. People naturally resist that. We want to stay in our comfort zone and hold onto what’s familiar. Sometimes circumstances force us to give up something and we have the chance to gain something new. But more often than not, if we want to make positive trades, we have to maintain the right attitude and be willing to give up some things.

A successful life is a series of trade-offs.

23. Those Who Start the Journey with You Seldom Finish with You

If the people joining your team have high potential and those leaving have limited potential, the team’s future is bright. If those who are coming on board are limited and those who are leaving are gifted, your future is dim.

“Anytime you ignore reality for the sake of the relationship, you will have problems.”

24. Few Leaders Are Successful Unless a Lot of People Want Them to Be

Followers make leaders possible. Great followers make it possible for there to be great leaders. If you never learn that lesson as a leader, your effectiveness will never reach the highest level, and you will be forever recruiting members to a team with high turnover. People appreciate working for someone who appreciates them.

Identifying the kinds of people who are also helping you:

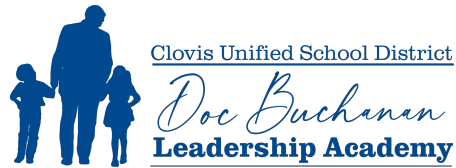
- Time Relievers—people who save me time
- Gift Complementers—people who do things I am not gifted to do
- Team Players—people who add value to me and my team
- Creative Thinkers—people who solve problems and give me options
- Door Closers—people who complete assignments with excellence
- People Developers —people who develop and raise up other leaders and producers”
- “Servant Leaders—people who lead with the right attitude
- Mind Stretchers—people who expand my thinking and my spirit
- Relational Networkers —people who bring other people into my life who add value to me
- Spiritual Mentors—people who encourage me in my faith walk
- Unconditional Lovers —people who know my weaknesses, yet love me unconditionally”

25. You Only Get Answers to the Questions You Ask

“He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask is a fool forever.”

Chinese Proverb

When you know the right questions and go to the right people with them, you will ultimately get the right answers!



John's Observation

- When I'm with the wrong people asking the wrong questions, I am wasting my time.
- When I'm with the right people asking the wrong questions, I am wasting their time.
- When I'm with the wrong people asking the right questions, I am spending time.
- When I'm with the right people asking the right questions, I am investing my time.
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26. People Will Summarize Your Life in One Sentence—Pick It Now

“Life is like a parachute jump, you’ve got to get it right the first time.” – Eleanor Roosevelt



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