



## The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

Follow Them and People Will Follow You

John C. Maxwell  
Thomas Nelson Publishing 2007  
366 pages

### Rating

9 Importance  
8 Innovation  
9 Style

### Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy

Sales & Marketing

Finance

Human Resources

IT, Production & Logistics

Career & Self-Development

Small Business

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Concepts & Trends

### Take-aways

- Leadership can be learned and it's based on principles and laws of nature.
- It's only when you enhance your leadership ability can you truly increase your personal and professional effectiveness.
- Leadership is leadership no matter which period of history it is practiced.
- Each of the laws is like a tool in a toolbox. Learn to use one and you will become a better leader. Learn to use them all and your leadership and influence will soar and others will follow you.
- Everything raises and falls on leadership.
- A leader must follow in order to become an excellent leader.
- To achieve great things, you need a team. Building a winning team requires understanding of some principles. Whatever your goal or project, you need to add value and invest in your team so the end product benefits from more ideas, energy, resources, and perspectives.
- Keep in mind that the laws can be learned; can stand alone; carry consequences with them; is the foundation of leadership.
- Everything Rises and Falls on Leadership. The more you try to do in life, the more you will find that leadership makes the difference. Any endeavor you can undertake that involves other people will live or die depending on leadership.
- An effective leader requires of respect, experience, emotional strength, discipline, vision and skills.
- Personal and organizational effectiveness is proportionate to the strength of leadership.

- Becoming a leader is a lot like investing successfully in the stock market. If your hope is to make a fortune in a day, you're not going to be successful.

## Relevance

In this summary, you will learn the **21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership**.

### Review

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership mentions 21 laws a leader must follow in order to become an excellent leader. This can not only be applied to an educational setting, at home, a job, in church, but to the law of life as well. The book provides hope, direction, encouragement, and specific procedures, providing the necessary tools to fulfill a leadership role. Maxwell (1998) understands that the laws to be discussed can be learned, ones easier to apply than others, but that all can be acquired. That the laws can stand alone, you do not need one in order to learn another. That laws carry consequences with them, if you apply laws correctly people will follow you, if you violate or ignore them you will not be able to lead others. That the laws are the foundation of leadership, once you learn the principles you have to practice them and apply them to your life.

## Summary

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### 1. The Law of the lid.

*Leadership Ability Determines a Person's Level of Effectiveness*

Your leadership is like a lid or a ceiling on your organisation. Your church or business will not rise beyond the level your leadership allows. That's why when a corporation or team needs to be fixed, they fire the leader.

The lower an individual's ability to lead, the lower the lid on his potential. The higher the leadership, the greater the effectiveness.

### 2. The Law of Influence.

*The True Measure of Leadership is Influence – Nothing More, Nothing Less*

Leadership is simply about influencing people. Nothing more, nothing less. The true test of a leader is to ask him to create positive change in an organisation. If you cannot create change, you

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cannot lead. Being a leader is not about being first, or being an entrepreneur, or being the most knowledgeable, or being a manager. Being a leader is not just holding a leadership position. (“It’s not the position that makes a leader, but the leader who makes a position.”) Positional leadership especially does not work in volunteer organisations. The very essence of all power to influence lies in getting the other person to participate. “He who thinks he leads, but has no followers, is only taking a walk.”

## FIVE MYTHS ABOUT LEADERSHIP

### 1. The Management Myth.

The best way to test whether a person can lead rather than just manage is to ask him to create positive change. Managers can maintain direction, but they can’t change it.

The only thing a title can buy is a little time – either to increase your level of influence with others or to erase it.

### 2. The Entrepreneur Myth.

People may be buying what they sell, but they’re not following.

### 3. The Knowledge Myth.

IQ doesn’t necessarily equate to leadership.

### 4. The Pioneer Myth.

Being first isn’t always the same as leading

### 5. The Position Myth.

“It’s not the position that makes the leader; it’s the leader that makes the position.”

– Stanley Huffy

## 3. The Law of Process.

*Leadership Develops Daily, Not in a Day*

Leadership is learned over time. And it can be learned. People skills, emotional strength, vision, momentum, and timing are all areas that can and should be learned. Leaders are always learners.

## THE FOUR PHASES OF LEADERSHIP GROWTH

### 1. I don’t know what I don’t know.

As long as a person doesn’t know what he doesn’t know, he doesn’t grow.

### 2. I know what I don’t know.

“To be conscious that you are ignorant of the fact is a great step to knowledge.”

– Benjamin Disraeli

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### 3. I grow and know and it starts to show.

“The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes.”

– Benjamin Disraeli

### 4. I simply go because of what I know.

#### 4. The Law of Navigation.

*Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course*

Vision is defined as the ability to see the whole trip before leaving the dock. A leader will also see obstacles before others do. A leader sees more, sees farther, and sees before others. A navigator (leader) listens – he finds out about grassroots level reactions. Navigators balance optimism with realism. Preparation is the key to good navigation. “It’s not the size of the project, it’s the size of the leader that counts.”

#### P.L.A.N. A.H.E.A.D.:

Predetermine a Course of Action.

Lay Out Your Goals.

Adjust Your Priorities.

Notify Key Personnel.

Allow Time for Acceptance.

Head into Action.

Expect Problems.

Always Point to the Successes.

Daily Review Your Plan

### 5. The Law of E.F. Hutton.

*When the Real Leader Speaks, People Listen*

Hutton was America’s most influential stock market analyst. When he spoke, everyone listened. When real leaders speak, people automatically listen. Conversely, in any group or church, you can identify the real leaders by looking for those who people listen to. According to Margaret Thatcher, “being in power is like being a lady – if you have to tell people you are, you aren’t.” (p45) Tips for a Positional leader – like a newly appointed minister – who wants to become a REAL leader... look for the existing real leaders and work to have influence there. Factors involved in being accepted as a new real leader include character, building key relationships, information, intuition, experience, past success. and ability.

POSITIONAL LEADERS speak first, need the influence of the real leader to get things done, and influence only other positional leaders.

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REAL LEADERS speak later, need only their own influence to get things done, and influence everyone in the room.

## PEOPLE BECOME REAL LEADERS BECAUSE OF...

CHARACTER – WHO THEY ARE  
RELATIONSHIPS – WHO THEY KNOW  
KNOWLEDGE – WHAT THEY KNOW  
INTUITION – WHAT THEY FEEL  
EXPERIENCE – WHERE THEY’VE BEEN  
PAST SUCCESSES – WHAT THEY’VE DONE  
ABILITY – WHAT THEY CAN DO

### 6. The Law of Solid Ground.

*Trust Is the Foundation of Leadership*

Trust is the foundation for all effective leadership. When it comes to leadership, there are no shortcuts. Building trust requires competence, connection and character.

How do leaders earn respect? By making sound decisions, admitting their mistakes, and putting what’s best for their followers and the organization ahead of their personal agendas.

### 7. The Law of Respect.

*People naturally follow people stronger than themselves*

Even natural leaders tend to fall in behind those who they sense have a higher “leadership quotient” than themselves.

When people get together for the first time as a group, take a look at what happens. As they start interacting, the leaders in the group immediately take charge. They think in terms of the direction they desire to go and who they want to take with them. At first, people may make tentative moves in several different directions, but after the people get to know one another, it doesn’t take long for them to recognize the strongest leaders and to follow them.

Usually the more leadership ability a person has, the more quickly he recognizes leadership – or its lack – in others. In time, people in the group get on board and follow the strongest leaders. Either that or they leave the group and pursue their own agenda.

### 8. The Law of Intuition.

*Leaders evaluate everything with a Leadership bias*

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### THREE LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP INTUITION

1. Those who naturally see it
2. Those who are nurtured to see it
3. Those who will never see it.

Leaders see trends, resources and problems, and can read people.

Leadership is more an art than science.

### 9. The Law of Magnetism.

*Who You Are Is Who You Attract*

Leaders attract people like themselves. Who you are is who you attract. (Mmmm... I thought like poles were meant to repel!) Handy hint: “Staff” your weaknesses. If you only attract followers, your organisation will be weak. Work to attract leaders rather than followers if you want to build a truly strong organisation.

You will probably find that you and the people who follow you share common ground in several of these key areas: ATTITUDE, GENERATION, BACKGROUND, VALUES, LIFE EXPERIENCE, and LEADERSHIP ABILITY.

### 10. The Law of Connection.

*Leaders Touch a Heart Before They Ask for a Hand*

You must touch the heart before you ask people to follow. Communicate on the level of emotion first to make a personal connection.

Don't ever underestimate the importance of building relational bridges between yourself and the people you lead. There's an old saying: To lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart.

### 11. The Law of the Inner Circle.

*A leader's potential is determined by those closest to him*

“The leader finds greatness in the group, and helps the members find it in themselves.”

### THREE PHASES TO NEW GROWTH

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Mentally divide the people into three groups according to their ability to lead and deliver the results. Start with the bottom third, then the middle third, then the top third, replacing them with good, better, and best leaders.

You should try to bring five types of people into your inner circle

**POTENTIAL VALUE** – those who raise up themselves. The first ability that every leader must have is the ability to lead and motivate himself. Always keep your eyes open for people with potential.

**POSITIVE VALUE** – those who raise morale in the organization.

**PERSONAL VALUE** – those who raise up the leader. It's lonely at the top, so you'd better take someone with you.

**PRODUCTION VALUE** – those who raise up others.

**PROVEN VALUE** – those who raise up people who raise up other people.

## 12. The Law of Empowerment.

*Only secure leaders give power to others*

The only way to make yourself indispensable is to make yourself dispensable.

Mark Twain said, "Great things can happen when you don't care who gets the credit." Another point to ponder... "Great leaders gain authority by giving it away."

**BARRIERS TO EMPOWERMENT:** Desire for job security, resistance to change, lack of self-worth.

## 13. The Law of Reproduction.

*It takes a leader to raise up a leader*

Followers can't do it, and neither can institutional programs "It takes one to know one, to show one, to grow one." The potential of an organisation depends on the growth of its leadership.

**WE TEACH WHAT WE KNOW – WE REPRODUCE WHAT WE ARE**

Leaders who develop other leaders...

**SEE THE BIG PICTURE.**

**ATTRACT POTENTIAL LEADERS.** "Leaders don't flock. You have to find them one at a time." – Ross Perot. True. But as the Law of Magnetism also suggests, if you first develop your leadership qualities, you will be capable of attracting people with leadership potential.

**CREATE AN EAGLE ENVIRONMENT.** An environment where leadership is valued and taught becomes an asset to a leadership mentor. It not only attracts "eagles," but it also helps them to learn to fly.

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#### 14. The Law of Buy-In.

*People buy in to the leader first, then the vision*

If they don't like the leader but like the vision, they get a new leader. If they don't like the leader or the vision, they get a new leader. If they don't like the vision but like the leader, they get a new vision.

You cannot separate the leader from the cause he promotes. It cannot be done, no matter how hard you try. It's not an either/or proposition. The two always go together.

When followers don't like the leader or the vision, **THEY LOOK FOR ANOTHER LEADER.**

When followers don't like the leader but they do like the vision, **THEY STILL LOOK FOR ANOTHER LEADER.**

When followers like the leader but not the vision, **THEY CHANGE THE VISION.**

When followers like the leader and the vision, **THEY WILL GET BEHIND BOTH.**

As a leader, you don't earn any points for failing in a noble cause. You don't get credit for being "right." Your success is measured by your ability to actually take the people where they need to go.

#### 15. The Law of Victory.

*Leaders find a way for the team to win.*

"You can't win **WITHOUT** good athletes, but you **CAN** lose with them." Unity of vision, diversity of skills plus a leader are needed for a win.

**THREE COMPONENTS OF VICTORY:**

1. Unity of Vision. A team doesn't win the championship if its players have different agendas.
2. Diversity of Skills.
3. A Leader Dedicated To Victory and Raising Players To Their Potential.

#### 16. The Law of Momentum.

*Momentum Is a Leader's Best Friend*

You can't steer a ship that isn't moving forward. It takes a leader to create forward motion.

**TWO KEYS:** Preparation and Motivation. Leaders always find a way to make things happen.

**ONLY A LEADER CAN CREATE MOMENTUM:** Harry Truman once said, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." But for leaders, that statement should be changed to read, "If you can't make some heat, get out of the kitchen."

**TRUTHS ABOUT MOMENTUM:**

Momentum makes leaders look better than they are.

Momentum helps followers perform better than they are.

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Momentum is easier to steer than to start.  
Momentum is the most powerful change agent.

### 17. The Law of Priorities.

*Leaders Understand That Activity Is Not Necessarily Accomplishment*

To be effective, leaders must order their lives according to these three questions:

What is required? Always begin with what is required of you.

What gives the greatest return? If something can be done 80 percent as well by someone else in your organization, delegate it. If a responsibility could potentially meet that standard, then develop a person to handle it.

What brings the greatest reward?

### 18. The Law of Sacrifice.

*A leader must give up to go up*

The higher the level of leadership people want to reach, the greater the sacrifices they will have to make.

Successful leaders must maintain an attitude of sacrifice to turn around an organisation. One sacrifice seldom brings success. As he worked to turn around the Chrysler Corporation, Lee Iacocca slashed his own salary to \$1 per year. "When you become a leader, you lose the right to think about yourself."

### 19. The Law of Timing.

*When to lead is as important as what to do and where to go*

Every time a leader makes a move, there are really only four outcomes that can result:

The wrong action at the wrong time leads to disaster.

The right action at the wrong time brings resistance.

The wrong action at the right time is a mistake.

The right action at the right time results in success.

### 20. The Law of Explosive Growth.

*To add growth, lead followers. To multiply growth, lead leaders*

"It is my job to build the people who are going to build the company."

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#### A DIFFERENT FOCUS:

- Leaders Who Develop Followers
- Need to be needed
- Focus on weaknesses
- Develop the bottom 20 percent
- Treat people the same for “fairness”
- Hoard power
- Spend time with others
- Grow by addition
- Impact only people they touch personally
- Leaders Who Develop Leaders
- Want to be succeeded
- Focus on strengths
- Develop the top 20 percent
- Treat their leaders as individuals for impact
- Give power away
- Grow by multiplication
- Impact people far beyond their own reach

#### 21. The Law of Legacy.

*A leader’s lasting value is measured by succession*

“Leadership is the one thing you can’t delegate. You either exercise it – or abdicate it.”

#### LEADERS WHO LEAVE A LEGACY OF SUCCESSION...

- Lead the organization with a “long view.” They lead with tomorrow as well as today in mind.
- Create a leadership culture.
- Pay the price today to assure success tomorrow.
- Value team leadership above individual leadership. The larger the organization, the stronger, larger, and deeper the team of leaders needs to be.
- Walk away from the organization with integrity.

#### CONCLUSION

Everything Rises and Falls on Leadership.

The more you try to do in life, the more you will find that leadership makes the difference. Any endeavor you can undertake that involves other people will live or die depending on leadership.

- As you work to build your organization, remember this:
- Personnel determine the potential of the organization.
- Relationships determine the morale of the organization.



Structure determines the size of the organization.  
Vision determines the direction of the organization.  
Leadership determines the success of the organization.  
accumulate wealth. Believe that money can be attracted and governed by set laws and principles,  
and to focus on learning and applying those laws to reap the rewards.  
Do not wait for good things to happen. Act now!

## About the Author

**John C. Maxwell** is an American author, speaker, and pastor who has written many books, primarily focusing on leadership.