

52 Lessons for Extraordinary Leadership!

By Chris Widener

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Here is your first Leadership Lesson to help you become an Extraordinary Leader!

1. Establish Your Goals

The key to any achievement is goal setting. You have to know what it is that you want and how soon you want to have it. Whether you want to save a certain amount of money, lose a certain amount of weight, or yes, even become a certain kind of leader.

Let's face it, "I want to become a better leader," is relatively ambiguous, isn't it? Who wouldn't want to become a better leader? If you were to ask almost anyone whether or not they would like to become a better leader and have more influence on those around them, they would almost all say, "Yes!"

The question is: What does that mean in actuality? What does a "better leader" look like?

Action Point: Spend some time this week answering for yourself the following questions, then setting goals according to your answers:

Q. What does becoming a better leader look like to me?

Q. In what specific ways do I want to grow as a leader?

Q. What specific areas do I need to grow in?

Q. How much time am I willing to put in each day or week to grow in my leadership?

Q. What resources do I need to take advantage of in order to increase my leadership skills?

Q. What specific things can I do today and this week to begin my leadership growth process?

Q. What time frames am I looking at when I think of becoming a better leader?

Q. What people would I like to spend more time with who would challenge me to grow as a leader?



2. Personal Vision Statement

Vision statements have been in vogue for a while in the corporate realm, and rightly so. We ought to have a clear and concise statement of what we want to accomplish with our businesses. But there is another area that we ought to have a vision statement: Our personal lives.

Our personal vision statement will do a couple of things. One, it will give us clear direction in what we involve ourselves in. Two, it will be based on our strengths. When we combine these, it gives us the freedom to pursue those things that will cause us to be successful and allow us to stay away from those things that would play to our weaknesses and cause us to be unsuccessful.

A personal vision statement is particularly helpful if you want to become an Extraordinary Leader. Leaders, even more than followers need to know who they are, where they are going, and what they hope to accomplish.

As an example, here is my personal vision statement: “I will use my speaking and writing abilities to help others turn their potential into performance, succeed in every area of their lives, and achieve their dreams.” Note that it is based on my strengths, speaking and writing, and what I want to do, which is to help people achieve more. Now when I am deciding what to do with my day, I follow my personal mission statement and it keeps me doing the things I need to do to get the success I want!

Action Point: Take some time this week to start crafting your personal vision statement. Focus on your strengths and on what you want to accomplish. Keep it short, clear, concise, and memorable.

3. Vision

“Vision is the spectacular that motivates us to carry out the mundane.” Chris Widener

Vision is the cornerstone of Extraordinary Leadership. It is what motivates us to achieve and others to follow us. Vision is the big picture – and Extraordinary Leaders always know the big picture!

Do you have the big picture of where you are going with your business, your organization and your life? If not, it is time to develop your vision.

Covey tells us in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* to “Begin with the end in mind.” This is vision. How does it look when you are done? How does it turn out?

If you want to have the kind of vision that motivates you and causes others to follow, here are a few tips:

Make it grand! A vision should stretch people and give them something to shoot for. Set the bar too low and they will give a collective yawn. Set it in the middle and they will often decide the payoff isn’t worth the effort. Set it high and the spectacular motivates them to follow!

Make it clear. A good vision is one that is clear. Can everyone who you want to have follow you clearly explain the vision? If not, make it clear.

Make it simple. Fact: Simple works. We are inundated each day with thousands of words and most of them go in one ear and out the other. Whatever we want to have stick must be simple. The old adage is true: Keep it simple.

Make it memorable. It should be a simple phrase or two that people can memorize, especially if they hear it often enough. Think of some major companies you know of. Think of their “verbal logo” or vision statements. They are memorable, aren’t they? Yours should be too.

Action Point: Take some time to review your vision. Is it grand, clear, simple and memorable? If not, begin to re-craft your vision statement so that it is.

4. What Vision Does for You

Some people dismiss the idea of vision, and they do so at their own peril. Vision has been overblown at times, yes, but it is still the cornerstone of leadership. Here are a few things that vision does for us:

Vision:

See the end. Vision shows you where you are going – and it is always a good thing to know where you are going! Covey was right when he said to begin with the end in mind.

Imagines the best. Vision sees the good that can come for you, for others, and for your organization. It is the “best” that motivates people to follow you.

Sets the course. Vision sets the course out for everyone to see. They know where they are going and how they are going to get there. It leaves no questions.

Stretches the group. Vision breaks people free from the rut. It causes them to grow, to stretch. If an organization is going to do great things, they need to be stretched and vision is what does it.

Establishes the boundaries. Vision not only tells you what you will do but it also allows you to know what you won't do. It keeps you on track and off of rabbit trails that lead to nowhere.

Gives the purpose. Humans are people of purpose. It is what drives us. Capture the hearts of people through the purpose you give them and they will follow you anywhere.

Motivates the troops. People will respond to grand things. Make your vision big and big people will follow. Vision motivates people and gets them fired up to follow!

Action Point: Spend some more time on your personal and/or corporate vision statement. This week, run it through the grid above. Does it do for you and others what it is possible for it to do? If so, great. If not, spend some more time reshaping it.

5. Executing Your Vision I

It is one thing to have a vision – it is another to execute the vision. Fortune magazine did an article that asked the question, “Why do CEO’s fail?” The answer? Because they do not execute. It wasn’t a lack of vision or good ideas that did them in, it was an inability to execute the vision that did them in.

So, whether you are the CEO of a large corporation or the CEO of you life, you need to have a vision and understand how to execute that vision.

This issue and next we will go through the key elements of executing your vision. Here they are:

Develop Vision – check. Already done.

Surround yourself with a small team of people who can help you lead and carry out that vision. These people should have diversity of talents and ideas so as to provide you with the ability to cover all angles and bases.

Have that team sit together to punch as many holes in your vision as possible. This isn’t done to make you feel bad – it is done to make sure your vision can hold water. Go through your vision with this team until it can, changing what needs to change.

Develop the communication process. A lack of communication or poor communication is probably the number one reason people fail to carry out their vision. So come up with all of the ways and times that you are going to use to communicate your vision. Be sure to come up with different forms – verbal and written – and different times, so you can reach as many people as possible.

Action Point: Take these first elements and begin working through them this week and there will be more to come next week!

6. Executing Your Vision II

Last week we started the Execution process. The first items: Get your vision, develop a small, diverse team to go through the vision, and develop the communication process.

The next steps for executing your vision are:

Develop a strategic plan of implementation. This is what you and others will do and how and when they will do it. Take yourself through the whole vision step by step as to what needs to be done.

Develop alternative plans at each possible juncture where the plan may be turned to the side. In other words, play out the scenarios and decide what you will do and how you will proceed according to each possible alternative.

Begin to communicate the vision to the extended group that will carry out the vision. This is where you get the main group on board with the vision. Use many alternative forms of communication and do it regularly and methodically. Create vision in their minds and assign tasks and time frames.

Set the plan in motion. This is where the work actually begins. Note that up until now there has been a lot of ground laying and prep work. This is imperative before you actually begin. The better your planning, the less time for execution and the less likelihood of major problems that will derail your vision.

Evaluate. Take time to regularly evaluate how your vision is unfolding. See your strengths and play to them. Note your weaknesses and strengthen them. Shift people and resources as needed.

Action Point: This week, focus in on the elements we covered: Develop a strategic plan of implementation, develop alternative plans at each possible juncture, begin to communicate the vision to the extended group, set the plan in motion, and evaluate.

7. Skills I – Vision Casting

For the next few lessons I want to talk about skills of Extraordinary Leaders. When people are deciding, whether consciously or not, to follow you, they do so on two primary issues: Who you are - your character, and what you do - your skills.

This is why it is imperative to have excellent skills in specific areas – so you can increase your ability to influence.

One of the most important areas is Vision Casting. First, by now you should have your vision – and it should be clear, concise, memorable, and inspiring. If you don't have your vision, get it before you try to cast it!

Here are some ideas to cast your vision effectively and increase your potential for gaining followers:

Be passionate. If you aren't excited about it, they won't be either. If your vision doesn't get you passionate, get one that does. Whether you are writing about it or speaking on it – be passionate!

Do it repeatedly. Don't just expect people to get it the first time. You need to cast it out there over and over.

Start in the close circle around you and then move outward as they get it. Cast it to your leaders first, then the next tier, then the next etc until you are casting it to the whole company or organization.

Cast your vision in a variety of ways: Speeches, meetings, presentations, writing etc.

Action Point: Take some time this week to develop your plan for casting your vision. Then begin to actually do so.

8. Skills II – Strategy Development

"If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles." Sun Tzu

As the leader, you are first and foremost responsible for having a vision. But how do you get to the vision? Strategy.

You are responsible for developing the strategy for achieving your vision. Let me ask you this:

Do you know what your strategy is?

First I will do this.

Second I will do this.

Third I will do this.

And do you know the strategy if something throws your “Plan A” for a loop?

If this happens at juncture “A” then we will do this.

If this happens at juncture “B” then we will do this.

Strategy is laying out a clearly defined plan of attack and having at your disposal what you will do in case of being sidetracked by unknown circumstances.

Here is a basic plan for establishing strategy.

First, get a vision (I am going to hound you on this until you do! It is week 8 after all!)

Second, gather together some diverse minds who are known for their strategic thinking.

Third, come up with a basic plan for getting to your vision. Take into consideration all of your strengths and weaknesses and all of your resources.

Fourth, shoot holes in it.

Fifth, go back through and develop alternate plans in case of unknown circumstances.

Sixth, repeat until the plan is clear.

Seventh, begin the communication process.

There are a million pithy statements like, “Fail to plan and you plan to fail,” but they are true. Your strategy is your roadmap to organizational success!

Action Point: At least begin the seven-part process outlined above.
You should be able to get to at least step number three.

9. Skills III – Communication: Speaking

Before I get into this week's lesson, let me very clear in that I do not mean that you need to become an extraordinarily gifted motivational speaker – though that helps. No, in fact, many of the great leaders I know are good speakers and not more. So, with that, let's look at this idea of the skill of speaking.

There are two kinds of speaking you must master if you want to be an effective leader: Private and Public. Without getting into these too much, let me say that there isn't a whole lot of difference between the two, at least in terms of what you hope to accomplish.

So how do you become a better speaker? Here are a few tips:

1. Practice. Practice will make you better. It is imperative that you get as much practice as you can.
2. Read. Yes, read. You will be informed and educated when you speak and this goes a long way.
3. Be passionate. If you are passionate about something it will come through and this will make your listeners more interested in what you have to say.
4. Develop your vocabulary. Don't use words your audience doesn't know, but use words that will enrich your communication.
5. Get feedback. Ask someone to tell you how you do when speaking and what things you can change to become more effective.
6. Get resources: There are plenty of resources available for you. Join a Toastmasters group, hire a speech coach, or buy a video on public speaking.

Action Point: Take one of the above steps this week to make sure that you are developing as a speaker. Do it today if you can. Remember, action is the first step toward advancement!

10. Skills IV – Communication: Writing

If you are going to lead you are going to have to write. Only when you get to be the CEO of a huge company can you even begin to think about pushing that off onto someone else and even then you would be wise to keep writing yourself!

So how can you use writing to increase your influence? Here are some tips:

Become a good writer. There are lots of ways to do this, but the top ways are to write often, get feedback through a class or writers club, and to write in various venues.

Write often. Write often so that the law of repetition takes over and people begin to get the message. This doesn't mean the same thing every time. You have to change it up a bit or people will just stop reading.

Let your writing support what you are saying. If you are communicating effectively through speaking, then your writing becomes something that supports what you are saying. It says it in a different way, it says it at a different time, and it says it through a different venue. All of this will help you get the message across and support your vision.

Write through different venues. Write a book. Write a newsletter. Write an article. Write a memo. Write an email. Write a PowerPoint presentation. Send them at various times.

Write the same message using different words. Try writing a sentence out and then rewriting it in three different ways changing the words and structure. You have to change it up or they will stop listening.

Write using stories and examples. This was one of the best lessons I learned as a leader and as a professional speaker. People like stories and examples. I am more of a facts and figures guy, but stories and examples move people!

Action Point: Sit down and write this week. Try to write the same thing in three different ways. Try to write it for three different venues. Try to use a story or example for each one.

11. Skills V – The Inherent Difficulty of Communication

Often times, we leaders get frustrated because people don't get what we are saying. You see, as a "go get 'em" type of person, we are usually able to hear something just once and then we go do it because we are self-motivated and we listen.

I have found though, that if we take a moment and think about the inherent difficulties found in the communication process, we will see that the process can easily be messed up just because of those difficulties. That means that we need to communicate more clearly, more often, and with more patience!

Think with me about the process of communication:

Every thought begins in one person's mind. They have to figure out what they even think.

Then it goes to their tongue. They have to be able to articulate the issue. Often, this is a problem.

Next, it goes into the atmosphere or the situation/circumstances. For example, a joke would be welcome at a reception for a wedding or birthday, but not in the middle of a funeral.

Then it has to go to the receiver's ear. They have to hear it correctly and that doesn't always happen.

From their ear it goes to their mind. Do they understand the word? Do they have the correct definition of the word?

Lastly, it goes to their heart. How do they feel and react to the word.

You see, there is a lot that goes into communication and the Extraordinary Leader needs to take these things into consideration.

Action Point: Take a moment to process a communication effort you have made recently. How does the above apply. Now, make yourself aware of how these things may affect you in the coming week. Make every effort to be clear and patient. Sometimes the inherent difficulties require that we work a little harder on the communication!

12. Skills VI – Communication: Frequency

One of the keys to moving your organization ahead is to communicate effectively of course, but also to communicate frequently as well. Good communication a few times is good, but good communication a lot of times is better!

Remember that last week we talked about how communication has inherent difficulties and so we need as the leaders to be diligent at making effective communication happen. One of the ways we do that is to kick up the amount of times we communicate the same message.

For example, in a typical communication campaign, you may talk to your core leaders a couple of times, send out an email, drop it in the company newsletter and mention it at a large group gathering. That is five main times you communicate the vision. Let's be generous and say that you do that two months in a row. Now you have ten times you have communicated the vision. Pretty good

But let's learn something from people who are good at getting their message out: advertisers. They know that we need repetition to let it sink in!

So, to make sure you get all you can out of your communication campaign, let's see another way to do it:

Now you talk to your core leaders twice a week for two months, send out an email once a week for two months, drop it in the newsletter for two months and have four large group meetings in two months. To add to this, each of your core leaders (lets say six of them) each talks about it to their teams at their weekly meetings for two months.

Now let's do the math: In the new version of your campaign to communicate your vision or strategy, you have communicated the same thing seventy eight times!

Think they'll get it? At least they will be more likely to!

Action Point: Sit down this week and look through your communication plan. How many times are you communicating your vision strategy or whatever it is you are trying to communicate? Then decide on a few ways you can multiply the frequency with which you are doing so. Then implement the plan!

13. Skills VII – Communication: Listening

The natural thing to think of in regard to leadership is communication from the leader to the follower(s), but a very often-overlooked aspect is listening to your followers.

Remember, the definition of leadership is influence. And if you want to learn how to influence people, listening will provide you all of the answers.

If we take the time to listen to others they will tell us how to influence them. Listening will tell you what motivates them and once you find out what motivates them, then you will be able to construct your communication so as to touch them in a way that will maximize their responsiveness.

For example, let's say that you want to influence/motivate your employees to sell more product. So you think to yourself, "I will give them a \$1000 bonus if they sell X amount of product above their quota." But if you listen carefully to your employees you may find out that they are not money motivated. Perhaps you find out by listening to your employees talk about their lives, you realize that one of your people is in love with traveling and adventure. To offer him or her a \$1000 bonus may or may not influence/motivate them to sell more. But what if you were to offer a 5-day trip to a resort that is worth \$1000? Your out of pocket is the same but, because you have been listening, you are more apt to achieve your goal of influence because you touched them with what they are motivated by.

Listening also has many other benefits. Among them are:

Better relationships which increases influence.
Feedback on ways you and the company/organization can improve.
Early warning signs from your followers on a varied amount of issues.

Action Point: Take some time to speak with your followers. Ask them all sorts of questions. Then, just listen. Write down what they have to say. Don't interrupt or defend, just listen and take notes. Clarify if you have to, but just listen. Then take some time to review the notes and see what you may learn about yourself, your followers, and your organization. Then make the needed changes!

14. Skills VIII – People Skills: Rapport

Rapport is an ability to have a relationship that communicates affinity and connection and it is very important to your ability to lead.

This isn't to say that we will have deep relationships with everyone who follows our lead. Obviously we are at different stages with everyone. Some we know quite well and others we barely know. Some we may become friends with and do things together outside of work and others we see only inside the organization.

With that in mind though, we can build rapport with anyone, and the most effective leaders do. Skilled leaders are able to meet someone and through their interaction communicate to that person that an affinity, a connection or a bond is there. This gets at the heart of relationships, which, as you have heard many times over from me, is the key element to leadership.

So how do you build rapport, from the person you just met to the person who you have known and worked with for years?

Here are a few guidelines:

Ask questions and listen for connections. If rapport is the connectedness, then it behooves us to dig until we find a connection. If you take the time to ask questions and truly listen you will find something with almost anyone you come across. It may be your state of origin, the college you went to, your favorite sports team, etc. The point is, as you get to know people eventually you will find something that you share. This creates bonds that enable you to lead.

Care for them. Nothing creates a bond like one person caring for another. Sometimes it just means checking up on them. Is their child sick? Ask how they are doing. Did their wife just take the bar exam? Ask how it went. You get the point. Then follow up: For example, if your co-worker's wife passes the bar exam, send them flowers of congratulations.

Develop an aspect of your work or organizational life with that person that isn't all work. Talk about fun things sometimes. Go out for lunch. Do some things that build relationships.

Praise them. You can find something to praise people for: Their character ("You are the most honest person I know."), skills ("You

can really sell!”), and potential (“You have a great future here.”) are all areas you can work on praising a person in.

Action Point: Think of two people you need to build rapport with. Now take some of the ideas shared above, or ones you come up with yourself, and put them to work this week!

15. Skills IX – People Skills: Care

It has been said that people don't care what you know until they know you care, and it is true.

As leaders we are people who set our sites on a clear goal and go for it with all of our energy. But we are not simply robotic machines who are trying to attain a goal at all costs. We are also humans!

Not only will being a person who cares about others produce better relationships and a deeper sense of satisfaction, I believe it is also good leadership.

There are those who say that the leader must stand away from those who follow. I do not believe this. I believe we should draw near to those who would follow and to care for them.

Now, this doesn't mean that we will be close friends with every follower. It simply means we will care about them as people.

Here are some thoughts on how we can demonstrate care for others:

Know about them. Do you know their name? What they do for fun? Where they went to college? What their spouse's name is?

Ask them how things are going – and listen. Take the time to find out how life is for those who follow you. You will jump light years in the relationships department when you do, and as I always say, leadership is all about relationships.

Go the extra mile when things go wrong for them. Don't be a scrooge and count every day against them if they happen to have a hard time some time. Instead, do what you can to show that you care and want to help them out.

Believe me, when your followers know that you care, they will go the extra mile in following you and making you look good as the leader!

Action Point: Take some time this week to care for those around you! At the very least your relationships will grow. See if your ability to lead doesn't grow as well!

16. Skills X – People Skills: Friendliness

The age of the grumpy autocratic boss is over. Today, people simply won't put up with leaders who are not friendly. People are more aware of the kind of work environment that they want to work in and are willing to go elsewhere to get it. This being said, it is imperative that the leader is a friendly person.

The leader wants to be friendly for a number of reasons. First, because it is the right thing to do as a human being. If you have a hard time being friendly, you have more than leadership issues to deal with. Second, people will seek out leaders who are friendly. Three, you will find people much easier to lead and motivate others if you have a friendly relationship with them.

There is a fine line here, one that is not easily discernable. This is that you want to be friendly and yet you want to maintain your sense of leadership and authority. It is hard to lead when you position yourself as "one of the guys (or girls)." Pretty soon, they look at you as one of them, not as the leader. My advice is simply to be aware of this.

So what does it mean to be friendly? Here are a few tips to keep you friendly with others:

Smile. This is a basic one. Smile at people. When you pass them in the hallway, when you are speaking to them, whenever you can – smile.

Stay upbeat. Don't be a sourpuss. There is always a reason to be upbeat if you choose to be. There is always something to be excited about if you are looking for it. Share this with others and it is infectious.

Have a kind word. Take time to share a kind word with others. Tell them something positive about them. Praise them. Tell them they are doing a good, or great, job!

Action Point: This week, be acutely aware of your level of friendliness. Ask yourself if you are a friendly person. Ask a friend if they think you are a friendly person by nature or if perhaps there is an area you may need to work on. Above all, smile, stay upbeat, and have a kind word for the people you lead.

17. The Leader as Initiator

One of the character traits of an extraordinary leader is that they are an initiator. That is, they start things. The leader is not only the one who leads things once they get going, they are the one who acts as the initiator/catalyst and gets them going in the first place!

The process of initiation starts in the quiet of the leader's heart and mind where he or she finds the vision for where the group must go.

Eventually that vision must work its way out and the plan must be put into action. It is the leader who stands up and says, "Let's go!" Everyone else is still sitting at this point while the leader stands and calls them to stand up and move out!

What about you? Are you an initiator? One question to ask is, "What was the last thing I initiated?" Secondly you can ask yourself, "Did anyone follow?"

Are you usually the one who goes out ahead or one who jumps on the bandwagon once it is rolling? The true leader is the one who formulates the vision and initiates the process for everyone else.

Action Point: What can you initiate this week? Even if it is a small thing around the office, get in the habit of initiating ideas and actions. Initiate something this week!

18. Passion: Fueling the Fire

The leader is a person of passion. Vision is the intellectual aspect and passion is the emotional aspect. Together they give you dual engines that create a mighty force to move your organization forward.

Just like a fire needs to be refueled by adding wood, the life of a person and of an organization needs to be refueled as well from time to time. It is up to the leader to make sure that happens.

The leader is responsible for the passion of him or herself, his or her followers, and of the organization. Here are some ways to get your passion level up and keep the fire burning to reach your vision:

1. Get good material into the minds of the people of your organization. Motivational training materials are almost always worth the money spent on them. Keep a good library full of tapes and CD's as well as books on hand for your people to read – and for you to use too!
2. Keep the attitude up at the office. Do all you can to keep the mood positive and upbeat. This will keep the passion from being sucked out of the organization.
3. Set a big vision. Let your vision inspire the people who work for you. Let them know they are part of a group that is going places and doing things! A big vision can motivate people and keep them passionate.
4. Create small wins. Nothing keeps people passionate like winning. Winning is fun and emotionally fulfilling so keep those wins coming! Better to break your major goal into five parts that are “winnable” than to break it into three parts and risk losing the passion because they one part was too big a stretch for the group.

Action Point: Take some time this week to get good materials, keep your attitude up, set a big vision, and create a small win for your team.

19. RePassion: Re-fueling the Fire

Last week we talked about passion and keeping it going. This week we have a short lesson on what to do when the passion is G-O-N-E.

I have been there. Chances are you have too. You know what it feels like: You just don't have any passion, any emotional drive for what you are doing. Intellectually you can agree that it is a good thing but emotionally you are shot.

What can a person do in that situation? Here are a few thoughts:

One is to consider whether or not you are done. There are times in life when it is time to move on. Ask yourself if perhaps this is the time. To keep it more objective, bring in the advise of some trusted people.

Another idea is to take a break. Every five years I have taken a month off and taken my family to a secluded island to get away from it all – and I mean ALL. If you lose your passion, sometimes the best thing you can do is rest, relax and let your mind, body and spirit regenerate itself. Given the opportunity, the body is pretty good at that.

Another good idea is to check and see what kinds of input you are getting. Are you putting good stuff into your mind or junk? Are you watching more TV than usual or listening to naysayers again? You may find that you are. Re-fuel the fire and get the bad stuff out and the good stuff in!

The last idea I have for you this week is to get back to the big picture. Remind yourself over and over again what kinds of great things you hope to accomplish. Let your vision be grand again and see if that doesn't put some punch back into your passion!

Action Point: Knowing you are a leader, I know you are driven and busy. My action point for you this week is to simply take a break. Get away from it all. Enjoy your life. Rest a bit, even if it is just for a day. Better yet, start planning that long overdue vacation you have been thinking about!

20. Pursuit of Excellence: Go for it!

"Anybody who accepts mediocrity -- in school, on the job, in life -- is a person who compromises, and when the leader compromises, the whole organization compromises." Charles Knight

The leader must be a person of excellence. And this is not just the person who happens to be excellent in some area, say naturally gifted at administration for example, but someone who relentlessly pursues excellence.

Take a moment to think through your life and your work. Does it demonstrate excellence in all areas? Most? Some?

“Speed of the leader, speed of the team” is true in the area of excellence. How does what you do, and how you are, influence your followers? Tremendously! They take their cue from you. If you pursue excellence, they will be more likely to do so (some will still be slackers but eventually, if you are leading right, they get weeded out of the organization). If you are not a person of excellence, then they will most assuredly not pass you up! Think through your followers: Do they work harder than you? Dress better? Chances are you will always attract people who are one step behind you.

So if you want to lead others and you want those you lead to be excellent, you as the leader must first make it a basic pursuit to diligently seek excellence in everything you do!

Action Point: Take an “excellence survey” of yourself. Rate all the areas of your life and categorize them as one of the following: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as your ultimate goal!

"The real contest is always between what you've done and what you're capable of doing. You measure yourself against yourself and nobody else." Geoffrey Gaberino

"Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well." John W. Gardner

21. Pursuit of Excellence: Your Personal Life

My personal life? Is that what you are asking Chris? Yes, exactly. You see, your personal life has a tremendous effect on your professional life.

If you are having troubles at home, they most certainly will weigh on your mind during the day (Side note: This makes it important for us to realize that the same is true for our followers, thus making us all the more needful to be aware of how we can help them have better home lives). Your emotions etc. do not take a break from nine to five just because you are at work.

How is your personal life? Is it healthy? Is it whole? Are you living a life of integrity? All of these questions need to be answered because they impact your work life.

They also impact how people perceive you and whether or not they will allow you to influence them. For example, if you have an alcohol problem that your followers know about, even if it is “off the clock,” it is going to hurt your credibility with people and you will be able to influence them to a lesser degree.

But even more important than how you lead, there is the concern for you as a human and as an individual. You only get one go ‘round on this old earth, so pursue excellence in what you do! Make the most of it! Be the absolute best that you can be. You will enjoy your life more and be able to be more effective as a leader!

Action Point: Take an “excellence survey” of your personal life. Rate the areas and categorize them as one of the following: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as your ultimate goal!

22. Pursuit of Excellence: Your Physical Life

The physical life is one that I have only taken a serious look at in the recent years.

Yes, I always played athletics growing up but I was young and full of energy anyway. Then, when I was hitting the mid-thirties and had a few extra pounds, I decided to “get fit,” as it were. Two primary reasons drove this: One to make sure I wasn’t too fat when my metabolism REALLY dropped off, and two because I didn’t want my kids to be embarrassed of me. So I joined a gym.

What happened over the ensuing years surprised me: I became a fitness fanatic. I now work out for an hour and a half each day. I do aerobic exercise and I lift weights. I also watch what I eat. I am pretty fit.

Okay Chris, so what does this have to do with leadership? A few things:

One, if you are healthy, you live longer, and thus lead longer. If you’re dead, you can’t lead, unless you wrote a pretty good book. Enough said.

Two, if you are healthy, you have more energy to lead and work. This is really why I became a fitness fanatic. I realized how much more energy I had to go about my day. I got more done even though I was giving up that hour and a half. I had energy!

Three, working out relieves stress. And you lead better when you lead from the position of emotional strength that comes when your stress level is down.

Four, you will have more respect from others if you are fit. Call it unfair if you want to. I am not here to argue the merits of weight based discrimination but it happens. All other things considered as well, lose some weight and get fit and people will have one less thing to hold against you.

Five, you will feel better about yourself if you lose the extra weight and get fit. And when you feel better about yourself you lead better, pure and simple.

Action Point: Take an “excellence survey” of your physical life. Rate the areas and categorize them as one of the following:

Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as your ultimate goal!

23. Pursuit of Excellence: Your Emotional Life

Emotions. Us hard-charging “leader types” don’t like to talk about emotions. We are strong, intellectual, rational types, right?

Well, we are, but we are also emotional beings, like it or not.

So we do well as leaders to keep an eye on our emotions and make them healthy. Keep in mind that will look different for many different people. Some are naturally more “emotional” than others.

The first reason to pursue excellence in your emotional life is because you will function at a higher level. I cannot tell you how many leaders have sabotaged their ability to lead because they have gone off the emotional deep end.

Secondly, it enables you to relate to people better. You will be proactive rather than reactive. This counts for situations as well. As the leader you want to act upon situations not react to them because you are emotionally bankrupt or distraught.

So how do you pursue excellence in your emotional life? A few pointers:

One, be sure to rest and take good vacations or downtimes.

Two, work on your relationships to make them healthy. Nothing will drain your emotions like a bad relationship.

Three, consider going to a counselor to fix past problems or ward off future problems. There should not be any stigma any more to going to a counselor. I heard someone once say that we go to a doctor for a physical once a year, shouldn’t we go to a counselor every couple of years just to get a second opinion on how we are doing emotionally or to help us see potential problem spots? Good point.

Take care of your emotions and they will help take care of your ability to lead.

Action Point: Take an “excellence survey” of your emotional life. Rate the areas and categorize them as one of the following: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as your ultimate goal!

24. Pursuit of Excellence: Your Spiritual Life

This is brief and to the point.

You may be wondering what in the world I am doing with a booster shot on spirituality, but I can tell you, I believe it to be of utmost importance.

You see, we are whole people. We aren't just workers. We aren't just husbands or wives, or just leaders. We are very complex people who are fully integrated, which means that every area of our lives affects the other areas.

This is why it is important for us to become spiritually healthy. As we become healthy spiritually we will grow in our ability to lead. We may not even be able to "see" the direct connection, but it will be there.

While I am not going to go into the pros and cons of one spiritual belief versus another, I will encourage you to do the following:

1. Take time to pursue your spirituality. Spiritual questions are the most important ones we can ask ourselves, so take the time to do so.
2. Read some good literature on a regular basis that will shore up this area of your life.
3. Develop some relationships with others who can share your beliefs in a community of faith.
4. Take time on a regular basis to be quiet and to find solitude.

I believe that a spiritually healthy person is a better leader for two main reasons: One, they are stronger inwardly, and two, they are better able to avoid the excesses that often undermine long-lasting leadership success

Action Point: Take an "excellence survey" of your spiritual life. Rate the areas and categorize them as one of the following: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as your ultimate goal!

25. Pursuit of Excellence: Your Intellectual Life

I have found an interesting thing to be true:

Many leaders evolve to become pragmatic readers. That is, they read to understand things that will be immediately applicable, or at least seemingly so, to their current situations. Many of them rarely read anything “intellectual.”

Yet, as I have mentioned the past few weeks, we are fully integrated people. This means that sometimes, in order to become better leaders, it would be a GREAT thing to challenge ourselves to stretch intellectually, especially outside our typical area of learning.

We need to get the old brain firing on all pistons to keep ourselves mentally astute and agile. This in turn will make us better leaders.

What can you do to keep growing mentally and intellectually?

Here are some thoughts:

1. Join a book club that reads challenging books. You’ll kill two birds with one stone: You will grow intellectually and you will probably meet new friends!
2. Take some time each day to read even one paragraph from a book that will challenge your mind to stretch.
3. Hang out with friends who are smarter than you. I have a bunch of people I hang out with who are real thinkers and that makes me a better thinker myself.
4. Go back to school. Take some classes in an area that would challenge you intellectually.

It is always good to keep the old noggin growing, so make it a part of your life schedule. Do so and you will find it will come back to you in tremendous ways!

Action Point: Take an “excellence survey” of your intellectual life. Rate the areas and categorize them as one of the following: Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Now, take some steps this week to

raise each area up to the next level with the level of excellence as
your ultimate goal!

26. The Leader and Rest

As I write this I am four days away from going on a major vacation that I need very much!

I lead a lot of people. Many people depend on me for direction. I speak regularly to people on the topic of leadership and how to do it better. And it is tiring!

When I was younger I used to skip days off and took pride in how “hard” I worked. You know, the guy they always say, “Boy, he never takes a day off!” about? That was me.

Then I realized something: I was a bad leader when I got tired. I wasn’t sharp mentally. I didn’t see things clearly. I was short with people unnecessarily. And it wasn’t good leadership.

So I started being a stickler for days off and vacations. I found that I was a much better leader. You will too. Don’t worry about those who will say that you are becoming a slacker. You will be like the tortoise and the hare: You will outlast them and out-lead them!

Here are some pointers for resting well:

Get sleep. Lots of sleep.

Read fun stuff, not work stuff.

Go somewhere new if you can.

If you find yourself thinking you are lazy, it’s starting to work – keep being lazy!

Action Point: Take some time off this week. Don’t do any work and just rest. You need it and you deserve it! If you can, begin to plan your next vacation. At least get the dates on the book and if you can, buy the tickets!

27. The Leader and Friends

This week some thoughts on your friends.

First of all, never underestimate the power of your friends to shape not only your character, but your leadership skills as well.

I have many acquaintances who are leaders and some who are not. My friends, however, are all leaders. I believe that for me to maintain my ability to be a great leader, and for me to be able to learn and grow as a leader, I must reserve that my friends be leaders as well.

My friends shape my life in ways that you can readily see and in many intangible ways that are harder to see yet real nonetheless. By keeping friends around me who are leaders, I become a better leader myself.

Secondly, remember to keep friends who make life fun. Leadership is hard and it is so important to have friends you can turn to for a good laugh. Be sure to take time in life to enjoy it. Life isn't all work!

Third, keep friends who are encouragers. Leadership is hard enough as it is, let alone when your friends are discouraging. Have friends who challenge you and encourage you - people who lift your spirits and motivate you to go higher and higher!

Fourth, listen to your friends. If you have done a good job picking your friends, then you should give them full permission to speak into your life. I have three friends who can say almost anything to me. In fact, I invite them to. I ask them to. I need their wisdom in making decisions. They see things that I don't. They are people who care for me and have nothing to gain from speaking to me straight other than to see me excel. They tell me the truth when others won't.

Action Point: Take a look at your friends. Have you picked well? Spend some time this week with friends who are leaders, who make life fun, who encourage you, and who will tell you the truth as they see it! Do it – you will become a better person and a better leader!

28. The Leader and Loneliness

It is lonely at the top. That's what they say anyway. I have found this to be both true and not so true. Let me explain:

I have found that yes, indeed, I have been lonely as a leader. Why is this? One reason is because there are always going to be fewer leaders than followers so there is a higher likelihood that you will have fewer peers. Two, when you have to make hard decisions, and you will have to do so regularly, people will take the other side and even go against you. This can make you feel quite alone. But this is the price we pay as leaders – the great privilege of leading makes us vulnerable to having to be alone, both literally and figuratively, on a regular basis.

But it is also not true. Let me explain this as well. If you feel distanced from your followers, and you will, then you can feel camaraderie with your fellow leaders. This will take energy and discipline but if you make it a priority to get around other leaders, then you will be able to give some relief to that feeling of loneliness that you feel when you are walking that separate line from your followers.

Most of the richest times I have ever felt have been around other leaders. It takes a leader to know a leader. It takes a leader to understand and appreciate another leader.

So what to make of this this week? First, understand that if you will lead, you will have to be at a distance from your followers sometimes and this will make you feel lonely. Two, know that there are groups of other leaders who you can get around and work with, who you can have deep friendships with, that will bring you to a deeper place of fulfillment if you take advantage of it.

Action Point: Reflect upon your “loneliness.” Have you experienced it? Try to come to grips this week with the fact that to lead is to be separate from those who follow. Also, take a moment to think of other leaders around you who you could develop a closer relationship with so you can have a greater support structure.

29. The Leader and Tough Times

Tough and challenging times will surely come. That is a given. The question is what kind of leadership we will demonstrate during those times. Those who are weak leaders will see lasting damage done, if not see the organization fall apart completely. With Extraordinary Leaders at the helm, however, an organization can actually become stronger and thrive in spite of the tough and challenging times. That should be our goal, so here are some ideas on how to be an Extraordinary Leader in tough and challenging times!

1. **Keep Your Eye on the Big Picture.** When things get tough, everybody's temptation is to become acutely focused on the problem. The Extraordinary Leader, however, will keep his or her eye on the big picture.
 2. **Don't Get Caught in the War or the Friendly Fire.** When it gets tough even the most loyal team members can be tempted to start shooting and, unfortunately, they sometimes shoot each other! The Extraordinary Leader is the one who can keep from being drug into the fray.
 3. **Be First to Sacrifice.** When it gets tough, like when there has to be cuts in salaries etc, the leader should do just that – lead. They need to not only be the one who is rewarded the greatest when all is well, but they need to be the first to sacrifice.
 4. **Remain Calm.** Panic is one of the basest of human emotions and no one is immune to it. The Extraordinary Leader, however, takes time out regularly to think the issues through so they can remain calm.
 5. **Motivate.** In tough and challenging times, people are naturally down. They tend to be pessimistic. They can't see how it is all going to work out. Thus, they have a hard time getting going. The Extraordinary Leader knows this and will focus in on being the optimistic motivator.
 6. **Create Small Wins.** One of the ways to motivate is to create small wins. The Extraordinary Leader knows that in tough times his or her people think that all is lost. They wonder if they can win. So the Extraordinary Leader creates opportunities for the team to win, even if they are small.
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7. Keep a Sense of Humor. Look, hardly anything in life can't be laughed at. The Extraordinary Leader knows that even if the whole company goes down the drain, we still go home to our families and live a life of love with them. The Extraordinary Leader keeps perspective and knows that we humans act irrationally when we get scared and fail, and sometimes that is humorous.

Action Point: take some time to go through the above-mentioned points and see where you rate on each. Then make a commitment to grow in the areas you need to work on.

30. The Leader and Integrity

I routinely remind people that leadership is a people science. It is less to do with skills (though you need skills) than with relationships. It is a “soft” science so to speak.

With this in mind it is important to remind ourselves that we must be good at relationships then, if we want to be Extraordinary Leaders.

Fact: All relationships are based on trust. And the level that people trust us is based solely on our integrity. High integrity produces high trust and many followers while low integrity produces low trust and few followers.

So what is integrity anyway? Think of the term “integer.” Do you remember what an integer is? An integer is a “whole” number.

“Okay Chris, I thought this was leadership, not math.” Well the answer is simple. Integrity, which shares the same root with integer, is to be whole, or not broken up. For example, you are the same with others as you are with yourself. Your values that you speak of are the values you live. There are no discrepancies.

So how does this play itself out?

Are you honest? Completely?

Do you live what you say?

Do you treat others the way you ask to be treated?

Are you harder on others than you are on yourself?

Do you cheat? Even a little?

Do you steal? Even a little?

You see, followers will pick up on these things. I have found that it is much better for my leadership to be above reproach, to leave people little or no room to question my integrity. Yes, some always will, but if we are living right that will come out of their own bias rather than from actual truth – and that then that is their problem, not mine.

You need to develop your character, your integrity, if you are going to lead more and more people because people demand, especially in this day and age of political scandal, that leaders be

people who are honest and full of integrity. Take your integrity to the next level and you will take your leadership to the next level.

Action Point: Ask yourself these questions again: Am I honest? Completely? Do I live what I say? Do I treat others the way I ask to be treated? Am I harder on others than I am on myself? Do I cheat? Even a little? Do I steal? Even a little? When you are finished going through these questions, decide on at least three areas where you will begin, immediately, to make gains in your integrity.

31. Sacrifice and Payoff

I truly believe that one of the main things that separates the successful from the unsuccessful, and the leaders from the followers, is the principle of sacrifice. You see, most people think that followers sacrifice a lot. Some do. But most followers and the unsuccessful people of the world remain that way because they are unwilling to sacrifice.

Think about it. If you are overweight, can you successfully lose the weight without sacrifice? No. Can you successfully save money without sacrifice? No. Can you successfully start a new business without sacrifice? No.

But you can go to the office and punch in at 9 am and then out at 5 pm, just like clockwork, and never sacrifice. Unfortunately, there will never be payoff either.

The leader knows that in order to get the ultimate payoff that they are looking for they will have to sacrifice more than the rest. The bigger salary, the successful business, the privilege of leading others all comes with a knowledge that there will have to be a sacrifice in order to achieve those things.

What about you? What payoff are you looking for? What leadership payoff are you looking for? Perhaps, rather than looking at the payoff you want, you should look at the kind of sacrifice that it will take to produce that payoff!

Action Point: Take some time this week to come up with three payoffs that you are looking for in your life and in your leadership. Then sit down and write out what kinds of sacrifices you will have to make in order to achieve that payoff. Then, when you are done with that, begin to sacrifice – and see your dreams come true!

32. Optimism

One of the character traits of an Extraordinary Leader is that he or she is an optimist!

People don't want to follow others who think the future is bad! They want to follow those who can see the future and let them know that there is a better place and that they can get them there! Do you see the cup as half empty? Then you are a pessimist. Do you see it as half full? Then you are an optimist. Do you see it as totally full - half air and half water? Then you are a Super Optimist! Are you known as an optimist? If so, you will become an Extraordinary Leader!

Optimism and pessimism are attitudes. They are attitudes that shape and formulate our entire existence. I mean, have you ever met a happy pessimist? Of course not.

In short, our optimism or pessimism is this:

- The way we interpret the past
- The way we experience and view the present
- The way we imagine the future

Have you given much thought about how your attitude, whether you are an optimist or a pessimist, affects you business, organization or school? Have you thought about how it affects you personally? And what about the team you are a part of?

What is optimism? It is a belief that things in our past were good for us, even if that means they were hard and taught us lessons. It is also the belief that things will be better in the future.

Here are some contrasts between optimism and pessimism and how they affect us:

- Optimism breathes life into you each day while Pessimism drains you
 - Optimism helps you to take needed risks while Pessimism plays it safe and never accomplishes much
 - Optimism improves those around you while Pessimism drags them down
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· Optimism inspires people to great heights while Pessimism deflates people to new lows

There is only one way that optimism and pessimism are the same and that is that they are both self-fulfilling. If you are an optimist, you will generally find that good things happen to you. And if you are a pessimist, you will find yourself in the not-so-good situations more often than not.

So can a person just become an optimist? Yes! We can choose to look at the world any way we want to. We can choose to look at the world and think the worst, or we can tell ourselves the good things about each situation. As you find yourself looking at your enterprise, begin to view it through the eyes of an optimist, and you will reap the rewards listed above, and so will the people around you.

There are tremendous benefits to being an optimist, as stated above. But there are some pessimists out there who will say, "But that isn't realistic." I say "Who cares?" If things go awry, at least I have spent my time beforehand enjoying life and not worrying about it. And, being an optimist, I would view the "negative" situation as an opportunity to grow and learn. So I can even look forward to my failures because they will be stepping-stones, and learning tools to be applied to my future success.

Action Point: Take some time to reflect this week about whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. And to the degree that you find you are a pessimist, especially in your leadership and with your followers, take specific actions that will make you an optimist!

33. Motivation I: Staying Motivated

“The measure of your success usually comes down to who wins the battle that rages between the two of you. The ‘you’ who wants to stop, give up, or take it easy, and the ‘you’ who chooses to beat back that which would stand in the way of your success - complacency.” Chris Widener

One of the toughest things about living, let alone leadership, is staying motivated! I know because even though I am frequently called a “motivational speaker” I sometimes have a hard time getting motivated myself! It is possible though! Here are some thoughts on how to get – and stay – motivated!

Get your “Motive.” When we think of motivational material or speakers, we tend to think of “emotional” things. But when we look at the root of the word, we see that it is actual “motive,” which tends to make us think of rational, logical, or intellectual things. So what is the point? Yes, we need to be moved emotionally, but the real power comes when we are able to articulate the rational motive for the desired action we want to take. So, when you start to wonder if you should continue leading – if you are lacking motivation – then take some time to re-find your motive. Put it at the forefront of your mind.

List the possibilities. Another thing we can do to create motivation is to force ourselves to sit down and write out all of the possibilities that could come of we were to take the desired leadership action. This causes our brains to begin to see the possibilities which will in turn cause us to want to seize the opportunities!

Start small. One way to get unmotivated is to bite off a chunk that is too big to chew and then have to give up – that is discouraging. Start small, get the win and that will keep you motivated for more!

Change your routine. Sometimes boredom sets in because we are just doing the same old mundane things. Try to do your daily priorities in a different manner, one that will break up the monotony and allow you to get re-motivated!

Reward yourself. John Maxwell says that the greatest management principle in the world is this: “that which gets rewarded, gets done.” That is true whether we are managing someone else or ourselves. So, stay motivated by giving yourself a reward from time to time. This will keep you plugging away for the next one!

Action Point: Take an area that you have been lacking motivation in and apply the above principles to that area. Do it every day for a week and see if things don't begin to change!

34. Motivation II: Motivating Others

As a leader, it is your job to motivate others and to help them stay motivated. With that in mind, here are a few ways to motivate others!

Inspire and Challenge Them. People want to be inspired. They want to be encouraged to think bigger and better things. They want to look for and climb big mountains. They want to have someone help them dream their biggest dreams. That's inspiration! They also want someone to set the high bar for them. They want someone to tell them that they can and should aim higher and go for more. That's challenge! Show them the lofty heights, because not many others are. And the one who does is the one who will lead them.

Strategize With Them. Some, but very few people want to be told what to do and then left alone. Most would like some direction and help in the area of strategy. Take the time to plot out the plan of action. Even if you know it, it is best to not just hand it over and say, "Now do it." Take them step-by-step so they learn how to do it themselves. Remember, we aren't just trying to get the job done; we are trying to get the job done and create new leaders under us. This is an investment!

Dream With Them. Take an interest in what it is that they want to accomplish in their life. Give them opportunity to dream about what your organization or business can become. Let them, encourage them, to dream big dreams, and then do all you can to share that dream, foster that dream, and make that dream a reality! Let them know that you are committed to them achieving their dreams and they will follow you to the ends of the earth!

Encourage Them to Shoot for the Stars. This is closely aligned with having them dream, but this has more to do with the size of their dream! Most people will underestimate what they can do or what they want to accomplish. Most people have much more potential than they realize, let alone live up to. Help them by encouraging them to stretch their dreams so they are even bigger and greater than their first plan.

Above all, keep in mind that the root word of motivation is "motive." Help people find their own motive for success and you will go a long way toward keeping them motivated!

Action Point: Take three people this week and do one of the above with each of them. Then repeat the next week and so on. See if they aren't a little more motivated soon!

35. Team Leader I: Coaching

The big buzzword now is “coaching.” Everywhere you go you hear that term. It is in fashion. There is an upside and a downside to this. One, it is good because we are indeed helped by people who coach us. Coaches are very much needed! Two, it is not so good because when something becomes a buzzword people begin to tune it out and even react to it. Unfortunately, they then often miss out on opportunities to improve and grow.

Leaders are coaches. We are teachers. We use our ability to influence in many ways and the analogy of a coach is a good one, so let’s take a look at that analogy and see if we can see some of the major aspects of coaching and how we may apply that to our own situations with those who we lead.

A coach knows the game. As the leader/coach, it is your job to be an expert on the “game.” How can you direct others if you yourself do not know all that there is to know about what the job entails. In fact, you may not even be able to perform better than the “players” but you are beyond them in your knowledge and can communicate in a way that enables them to perform.

A coach teaches. As the coach, you use your role to teach the “players” how to play, how to see what is happening around them, how to work together, and how to win! Take every opportunity you can, and utilize a variety of methods, to teach your people how to play the game.

A coach runs the practice. Part of the job of coach is to make sure the players practice. For every “game” there are at least three to five practices. This is a time when it doesn’t count so much, but when the players can try new things and hone their skills.

A coach encourages. Players can get discouraged. They can begin to lose confidence and doubt their abilities. It is the coach’s job to encourage them and motivate them. This isn’t just “blowing sunshine.” You only tell them what is true, but you make sure to tell them!

A coach also corrects. There is a time for encouragement. There is also a time for a kick in the rump and a good coach is not only able, but also willing to do it! Be sure to take the time to correct people. I have a firm belief in the one-minute manager approach,

which is to tell them in under one minute. You need to be clear and concise but try to make it short and not belabor the point.

A coach helps the players find their roles. Just as you wouldn't want a seven-footer playing guard on a basketball team and you wouldn't put a one hundred and ten pound person on the front line of a football team, so you should be aware that not everybody can play all the positions. The coach's role is to help the players find the roles that fit them best, work with their strengths and in which they will perform and excel.

A coach develops the strategy. The coach develops the strategy while the players run the strategy. The coach needs to know what is going to go on and when. They need to think through all of the possible obstacles and outcomes. Then they train their players to handle these as they approach them. If need be, they call a time out and reiterate the strategy or change it to fit the situation that has arisen.

A coach ultimately lets the player play the game. Yes, eventually, after all of the teaching, all of the strategizing, all of the practicing, the coach must let the players play. This is hard for some coaches! They want to play. But a good coach, and a good leader knows that eventually, they simply have to let the players play. They must fail sometimes. They must learn from the experience. They must succeed and win victory. And when that is done, the coach knows that he or she has done the job correctly.

Action Point: Look at the above characteristics this week. Take stock in where you stand. Then take two of them that you can make improvement in, and go to work immediately to improve them!

36. Team Leader II: Game Plan

Ultimately it is the players who execute and perform during the game, but it is the leader who must first develop, communicate and then coach the game plan.

What is the “game plan?” The game plan is just that: the plan for what you will do during the game.

Here are the major components of a good game plan:

It is well thought out and developed. A good leader takes the time to think through all of the issues involved in the vision. They develop a plan.

It takes into consideration all of the variables from your strengths and weaknesses to the other team’s strengths and weaknesses to the surrounding and circumstances you will be playing in.

It is communicated clearly and concisely, in a way that the players can understand and articulate, long before the game. A good leader knows that the game plan has to be communicated early, often and in such a way that the players not only get it, but thoroughly get it.

It is inspiring. A game plan can’t be dull if it is going to get people behind it with enthusiasm. It needs to stretch the players to achieve all that they can and to set high goals. This will motivate them to decisively execute the game plan.

It is flexible in that it can change as the variables change during the unfolding of the game. Things happen. Situations change. The star player gets hurt. Things go easier or harder than you thought. A good game plan has all of these variables taken into consideration before the game starts. And they also have a plan for dealing with unforeseen items.

It is viable and executable by those who will carry it out. A game plan has to be something that can actually be done. This is the fine line between being a stretch and being something that can be accomplished. It takes wisdom to figure that out – and experience. But that’s why you get the big bucks, right?

Action Point: Take some time this week to think about your game plan. What is it? Does it meet the above qualifications? If it does, then great. If it doesn’t, get to work on smoothing it out.

37. Team Leader III: Roles

One of the keys for a leader in leading a team is for them to have each person in the proper roles.

Sometimes you may have very good people who simply aren't performing, but only because they aren't in the proper role. An analogy would be to take a world-class point guard (the short guy on a basketball team) and to play him at center (the position for the tallest player). The athlete may perform okay, but would probably be mismatched and outperformed. Move that same person back to point guard and they would dominate.

So the idea is to make sure you aren't misusing a person by having them in a role that renders them ineffective. But even more important than what you will avoid is what you will gain when you have a person in the right role. Here are a few thoughts on what you gain:

You have people who perform at their highest levels. Put people in positions they should be in and they excel. This takes the team further and makes the leader look great!

You have people who are happier and thus more productive and even enjoyable to be around. If they are in the right position, they will achieve more and enjoy working from their strengths.

You have a smoother running team. Everybody works together and trust the others to perform in ways that they know they can because they are suited for that role.

You have a more efficient team. Think of the time and money you save because people don't have to go and redo things. You don't have to readjust people all the time. You don't have to fire people and then spend the time and money re-training. You are much more efficient.

These are just a few of the benefits of having people in their proper roles. Just like a world-class athletic team, our teams should have people in specific roles fitted for their strengths and the benefit they can bring the team.

Action Point: Take some time this week to look at your team. Think about each individual. Are they in the proper spot? Or should they be moved to another role. After looking at these

things, make the adjustments needed to ensure that your team members are happy in their role and that the roles are filled by people who can excel in them!

38. Team Leader IV: Practice

Practice makes perfect. Old saying, I know, but true, isn't it?

Think about any athletic team you belong or used to belong to. It would be outrageous to think about showing up for a game without having practiced, wouldn't it?

So what do you practice when you aren't in athletics? Here are some things you are constantly "practicing," since every day we are really in the game.

Our attitudes. Keep your players focused on keeping a positive attitude. This way when crunch time comes you will already know that your players have good attitudes. You may to encourage them to keep them but not to get them.

Skills. Keep your players skills sharp by constantly focusing in on excellence. Then when crunch time comes you will already be there and not have to get there.

Teamwork. Your team must constantly be working together and learning how to use one another's strengths. Then when crunch time comes they already know and trust one another and you won't have to build it then.

Persistence. Each day you practice you are building up for when the tough times come and you have to buckle up and get ready for the long, hard haul. You don't want to have to work on this when crunch time hits. You want to have people who know what it means through practice to be persistent and tenacious!

Action Point: Take a look at the practice you have in place for your team. Does it develop people's attitudes, their skills, their teamwork, and their persistence? To whatever degree it does not, sit down this week and develop a plan for doing so.

39. Team Leader V: Game Time

Game time always comes. Eventually it is time to put away the practice and see what the team is made of. It's crunch time. Time to see what you really have!

So as leaders what is important when you get to game time? Here are the keys:

Mental attitude. You as the leader have to have the proper mental attitude – your game face so to speak. You set the pace. You must believe that you can win.

Sharp focus. Nothing can distract you from the plan and the execution of the plan. You have laser like focus and require it from your team.

Delegated authority. You have done most of your job in practice. Now it is time for the players to play. They must have authority to make decisions and carry out the plan of attack. Yes, you will interject from time to time but it is now their game.

Encouragement. There is no sense in berating your players. It simply does no good. Instead, take every chance you can to encourage and motivate them. Even if they blow it, make a point to encourage them: "Don't worry - refocus," works a lot better than, "How could you do that you stupid imbecile?"

Directness. Be direct when you need to speak to your players. Don't beat around the bush. Get to the point. Be clear. Be concise. The same way a coach wouldn't lollygag around with their communication in the heat of a championship game, you shouldn't either.

Short correction. If a player needs to be corrected, do it in the shortest possible way that still leaves them with clear understanding and direction. And don't do it in front of the others if possible.

Timely breaks. Everybody needs a time out. Take them from time to time to rest and refocus on the task at hand, as well as to make adjustments to the game plan if need be.

Celebration/reflection. If you win, then celebrate. You deserve it. If you lose, then take some time to reflect on what you can do better next time.

Action Point: Take some time this week, while in the game, to introduce the above principles into your action plan. Try each one at a different point.

40. Team Leader VI: Celebration

One of the greatest memories of my childhood was when I worked with the Seattle Supersonics of the National Basketball Association and we won the World Championship! Wow – that was awesome. We had a team party that I was invited to – pretty heady stuff for a twelve year old! But the grand event was a tickertape parade through the streets of downtown Seattle! Now that was a celebration!

You have probably all seen the celebrations that go on after a team wins the big game. Sports teams know something I think, that we business and civic leaders could learn from. We should celebrate our wins!

So how should we do this? I mean, we can't be spraying champagne all over the office every week! (I can see it now: "Johnson got the computer to work – let's party!") No, but we can celebrate, can't we?

If it is a small win, celebrate in a small way. If it is a big win, celebrate in a big way. Be sure to let folks know that there are celebrations coming. This will motivate them and keep them glad they work there. It will keep joy in the workplace and build relationships like you wouldn't believe. It will also create a sense of loyalty.

Action Point: Plan a celebration for sometime the next week. If things aren't going so well, look for something – anything – to celebrate. You can surely find something. If things are going GREAT – then have a great celebration!

41. The Power of Inspiration: How to Inspire Others

Inspire: to influence, move, or guide: to exert an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on.

This is what we as leaders want to do! We want to get people to move. We want to guide them. And we want to do it in a lively way.

The first thing that an aspiring leader must realize is that they must be inspiring! That is, they must be capable of, and willing to inspire people on to greater things than if the leader were not in their lives.

So, is this too grandiose an ideal for the average local business owner? Absolutely not. The people who work at your business, school or organization need to be inspired by you on a regular basis. It is what keeps them from giving up.

Here is the best thing you can do: Remind them of the big picture.

They aren't just serving food, they are helping families spend time together, so make it enjoyable.

They aren't just changing oil, they are helping make sure a woman and her children don't break down on the side of the road at night.

They aren't just teaching reading, they are helping open a mind to the mysteries of the world.

They aren't just selling gifts, they are helping people show their appreciation to others in a tangible way.

Next, be inspired yourself. Make sure that you are fired up. They will take their cue from you.

Action point: This week: **INSPIRE!** Take the time to help people understand the big picture. Go to lunch or coffee with one person this week simply to help them get inspired!

42. Developing Other Leaders

One of the marks of an Extraordinary Leader is that he or she develops other leaders, both for the present and for the future. They see that their leadership isn't the only important piece. Other leaders create the opportunities for the organization to move forward.

So first and foremost I want to challenge you as the leader to make a firm commitment to develop other leaders. This will take time, money and energy. Time, money and energy that you will on the surface think you and the organization do not have. But let me challenge you to go beyond being an ordinary leader who sees only the immediate, and become one who sees the future – and the need for future leaders. This is no small commitment and I want to encourage you to make it.

Then what? What do you do after the commitment is made?

A small way to start is simply to have a weekly or monthly book club where you read leadership books and discuss them and their application.

A more extensive way would be to send people to regular leadership development classes or to an executive coach who can help them. Even leadership courses at Graduate School Extensions are possibilities.

The most extensive would be to develop a leadership training program that you carry out in house. This seems like a big deal and in a way it is, but can be relatively easy to set up.

Action Point: Take a step toward developing the future leaders at your organization. Even if you simply take the step of identifying them, that is a move in the right direction. Determine what level your organization needs to get involved with leadership development. Then take a step in implementing it.

43. The Character Traits of the Leader: Integrity

One of the key points I make in my leadership training is that people decide to follow you based on two main things: Your character and your skills. They want to know that you have high enough character to be trustworthy, and they want to know that your skills are good enough to take them forward.

A person with high character and low skills is a nice guy – but not a leader. A person with high skills and low character is a charlatan – and certainly not a leader for long, if ever. But a person with good character and good skills has the makings of a leader.

So what are the character traits? More importantly, what is the key character trait?

Integrity. Now, I know that integrity is a word that is thrown around a lot and means different things to different people, but I have a simple explanation that I found while reading a while back that I think gives us a great word picture to help us understand the importance of integrity.

Integrity shares the same root word as “integer.” Do you remember from high school math what an integer is (I know for some of us that is quite some time ago!)? An integer is a whole number.

Integrity is about living your life as a whole. That means you don’t divide your life, your morals, and your values up into parts. You aren’t honest in one situation and dishonest in another. You are who you are no matter where you are.

This is very important for trust. Those who watch you and make the decision to follow you must see you whole enough that they won’t have to wonder which person they are going to get, the honest or dishonest one for example.

So let me ask you to take stock of your integrity. Would others see your life as one that is whole or one that is divided? To the degree that you live as a whole life is to the degree that you will breed trust in your followers and cultivate extraordinary leadership.

Action Point: Take some time this week to look inside – I mean a really honest look – and see how your integrity stacks up. Think about how it may or may not affect your followers. If you are really gutsy, ask a friend or colleague to give you their thoughts on your integrity.

44. The Character Traits of the Leader: Optimism

I know that we covered optimism once before but it is such an important topic that I want to cover it again as a reminder of its importance.

The leader is person who extends hope to followers. And hope springs from an optimistic outlook on the future. I truly believe that if you are going to be an Extraordinary Leader, you must first be a person who is optimistic, either by nature or by choice.

Some people are by nature optimistic. That's great as long as we don't get rose-colored glasses and see things in such a way that they are not realistic. If you are by nature optimistic, run with it but check yourself from time to time that you do not oversell your vision because ultimately you have to deliver. Not delivering would produce a lack of trust which is a leadership killer.

What if you aren't by nature an optimist? You can be an optimist by choice. In every situation and outlook you will be able to lay out every possible scenario. From that, you have a choice in what you believe will be true. Do you choose to believe the worst? Or do you choose to believe the best? Either way, you are likely to get what you believe!

Optimism breeds hope in your followers and they need hope. They need to believe that their work means something. They need to believe that there is purpose in their actions. They need to believe that there is a worthwhile goal they are striving to attain. You can paint that picture for them by optimistically leading them toward your vision.

Action Point: Make a specific goal of being optimistic this week. Write something optimistic to one or more of your followers each day this coming week. Say something optimistic to one or more of your followers each day this coming week.

45. The Character Traits of the Leader: Risk-Taking

The life of the mundane leader is one that is lived with no risk.

The fact is that nothing of any great accomplishment has ever happened without someone, or some group, taking a risk. And it usually starts with the leader.

A leader will see the future and know that the only way to get there is to step out and take a risk. To forge new ground means leaving the safety of the current ground. Yet most people never risk. They are bound by fear of the unknown and the comfort and warmth of their current situation. They settle.

But not you! You want more. You want better. And not just for yourself but for those around you. You know that the **ONLY** way to get to the next level, and the levels beyond that is to take risks. Risk of reputation. Risk of capital. Risk of resources. Risk of time and energy.

What if it doesn't work? Then you will be exactly where you started, no worse for the trying.

My favorite quote of all time is from Teddy Roosevelt: Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.

Take risks. Now, I don't mean to be risky. There is a big difference. One is calculated risk. That is good. We think it through, we know what it will take, we make a plan, and we go for it. That is risk. Being risky is throwing yourself willy-nilly at something and hoping it works. Playing the stock market is a risk. Going to the casino is risky!

What risks should you take? What risks must you take? What risks will you take? Risk is the bridge to success.

Action Point: Take some time this week to decide what risks you know you have to take. Then come up with the first three steps that you will have to take as you risk in that way. Then take the first step.

46. The Character Traits of the Leader: Responsibility

I am continually amazed at how little responsibility people will take. I am sure you are too. We live in a day and age where so many people either want to blame others or they want to give excuses for their own behavior. Not so with the Extraordinary Leader!

The first distinction I want to make is the difference between accepting responsibility and taking responsibility.

The average follower, or the ordinary leader will accept responsibility. When push comes to shove, a decent follower will accept the responsibility given them. But this is reactive in nature.

The Extraordinary Leader on the other hand willingly and purposefully takes responsibility. This is proactive in nature. It is an expression of the initiating nature of the true leader.

The Extraordinary Leader looks at what is coming down the road and steps up beforehand to in essence say, "I am responsible for this." They take the lead. They let others know that "the buck stops here." And when others know where the buck stops, that is the person they will look to for leadership.

Every organization needs people who will take responsibility. Doing so will not only make your organization stronger, it will make you into the leader you want to be.

Action Point: Historically have you been one to accept or take responsibility? What are some areas now where you are simply accepting responsibility? What area do you know deep down you should be taking responsibility in? This week, take responsibility by taking action in that area. Tell someone, or maybe more than one person, that you are taking responsibility for that area.

47. Kinds of Followers: The “Who Cares” Person?

Ah, the person who just doesn't care. We all know people like this don't we? They work there, but they don't care. They are late, their work is shoddy and they just don't get the vision of what we are trying to accomplish. If they are honest, they admit they don't care. If they are dishonest, they say they care but their actions just don't bear that out.

So what do you do with a “who cares” person? First let me say that one of my core values is that every person matters. Every person is important. So this isn't just a matter of saying that the “who cares” person doesn't matter and we just need to get rid of them. I truly believe that most people who we would classify this way will do well if in the right place. With that said, here are the options:

Find out why they don't care. If you think they just don't care, it is your job to find out for sure. It could be that they have something else on their mind. Maybe they have been sick or are having marriage problems. Sit them down and say, “It seems like you don't have a lot of interest in what we are doing, like you just don't care much. Is that true or am I misreading you?” If they admit it, then move on to the next stage.

Make sure they understand the vision. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, make sure they understand the vision of the organization. Ask them if they know what it is. If not, explain it to them. Make sure you go into detail. When you are finished ask them if they think they can get excited about that. If not, then move to the next stage.

Find the right spot for them. Again giving them the benefit of the doubt, maybe they are in the wrong place in the organization. Take some time to find out from them where they might be a better fit as it relates to their strengths and weaknesses as well as from your standpoint. When you have that figured out – if it can be done – then tell them you would like them to make the move. If they move and work, great. If they won't move or they don't work out at the new spot, then it is time to go to the next stage.

Fire them. There comes a time sometimes when the best thing to do is to fire someone. It is good for them, good for you and good for the organization. When it comes time, be sure to do it directly but gracefully. But do it. You owe it to your organization to have people who care in each and every position.

Action Point: If you can, find one person who follows you who fits the “who cares” pattern. Then begin to process with them either transforming them into people who care... or people who work somewhere else.

48. Kinds of Followers: The Antagonistic Person

I am of the firm belief that antagonistic people need to be firmly dealt with. By the time they are at this spot they are dangerous – to you, to the organization, and to themselves. So let's take a look at the best way to deal with the antagonistic person:

Straight on! Sit them down. Say something like, "I can tell that you are very antagonistic toward me. I can deal with the fact that you may be made or unhappy. What I can't deal with is letting it stay that way. Now, the way I see it, we are either going to have to change your attitude or change your place of employment."

At this point I think it is best to throw a line of conciliation. Something like, "I would be happy to discuss in brief order what got you to this place, and even admit my own fault as it may come in to play. So, I would like to give you the opportunity to speak your mind. My only ground rule is that it not just be a gripe session but focus just on the facts that can be used to come to a solution."

Give them their say. Admit your faults if they are legitimately brought up.

Then say something like, "Okay, now I would like to discuss how we can get past this and work together on a solution. As I said earlier, leaving it the way it is is not acceptable. So, do you have any ideas on how we can help you get back to the point where you are not only not antagonistic, but wholeheartedly in line with what we are doing here?"

You have now laid the groundwork:

There must be change.

You are willing to admit that you may have been part of the problem.

You expect them to admit their state.

You expect them to work on solutions.

Now, if they will work on the solutions and you see change, then you keep them. If not, they need to go – period! Life is too short, or both them and you.

Action Point: Got that antagonistic person in mind? I thought so. Okay, gather your guts and set the time this week when you are going to meet with them. Then do it.

Note: Be sure to check your local labor laws or company policies. You may not be able to do it as I described above, but this is the basic attitude and process.

49. Kinds of Followers: The Immovable Rock

We all know these kinds of people. They aren't antagonistic per se, but they just won't move. You can offer them raises, try to motivate them, put them in team situations or just leave them alone. You can train them, pitch them on vision, plead with them or even threaten, but they just don't move. Maybe they think they are irreplaceable, maybe they figure they are part of the family and can't be fired, maybe they are afraid, or maybe they are just not very smart. Hmmm. What to do with this kind?

As you see in the above paragraph, we have already exhausted our options. We have tried everything. In fact, you have to try everything because that is your job. Do what you can to find their motivation.

But if you try to find what their motivation is, and you have fulfilled your obligation as the leader to find their motivation, there comes a time to call them on their obligation.

You see, it is always best to lead people through motivation, and followers who work for good motivators are fortunate people indeed. But there also comes a time when the follower must be responsible to the obligation. They are obligated through both their paycheck and their integrity to get the job done in an excellent way and in a timely manner with a positive attitude – period! I believe those are the expectations every organization of excellence should have. And people who are willing to cash their paychecks there are obligated to perform.

So what is your obligation if your immovable rock won't fulfill theirs? You have an obligation to your team. You have an obligation to your owners (if you aren't the owner). You have an obligation to the customers and clients. Your obligation is to get the immovable rock out and a new fired-up person in.

Action Point: Got an immovable rock? Time to get rid of it. You have an obligation to fulfill. Take some time this week to plot out how and when you will take the steps needed to take your organization to the next level. Then do it – get rid of the immovable rock!

Note: Be sure to check your local labor laws or company policies. You may not be able to do it as I described above, but this is the basic attitude and process.

50. Kinds of Followers: The Willing Person

The willing person is almost exactly the kind of person you want. We are getting close with this kind of person! They are willing, they just might not be able. But chances are we can make them able – and that puts us in a great spot! These folks are keepers, for now...

What to do with the willing person? They have great attitude. They want to become a better worker, a better follower, and a better leader. They have desire. They are willing to move forward. We need these kinds of folks!

The first thing you do with a willing person is to be appreciative of them and be sure to express that appreciation to them. Be thankful for their attitude.

The second thing you do with a willing person is to get an idea of what they would like to pursue. Sit them down and find out what exactly they are willing to do, how they are willing to work and grow, and just how willing they are.

The third thing you do with a willing person is to get them on a plan of growth. Take advantage of their willingness. Reward their willingness by investing in them. Give them what it takes to give them ability to go with their willingness.

The fourth thing you do with a willing person is to evaluate. Just because they are willing doesn't guarantee that they will be able. You want to make sure they have the skills that it takes to go to the next level and to be the kind of person who will take your organization to the next level.

Now, if they prove unable to go to the next level, look for another spot for them that might be better suited for their skills. You do not want to lose a willing person if you can keep them in a position they will excel at. It is better (and cheaper) to reposition this person than to go find another.

If you make a move with them because they are unable, and then you find out they are unable again, then... Well, you know: It is time to reposition them – out of the organization. Chances are though that this will hardly ever happen with a willing person.

If they prove able, then you are in the ballgame! This is great!

Action Point: Take stock of your willing people. Now take some time this week to go through the above process, looking for ways to connect some ability to their willingness.

51. Kinds of Followers: The Good to Go

Yes, we like the “good to go” person! They are ready and able to take responsibility and leadership! They are the kind of people who leaders love to have on the team and utilize.

Here are the keys to leading the “good to go” person:

Find out what they want to do: You want them to follow their passions.

Give them guidelines: These are like the guardrails that go along a highway. You can drive through the road and go at various speeds but the guardrails only come in contact with you if you are going severely off course.

Turn them loose: Let them go. Give them power. Give them resources. Watch them thrive.

Regularly assess: On a regular basis, get together with them and come along primarily as support. Find out how you can help them. Then do it.

If you get a bunch of “good to go” people on your team, they will pull you fast into the future. These are the people you want to surround yourself.

Action Point: Identify your “good to go” people this week. Then schedule an appointment with them wherein you will “turn them loose” on the world!

52. Evaluation

All good leadership includes good evaluation. It is the bedrock for seeing where you are and where you are going.

Evaluation of your life and work.

Evaluation of your skills.

Evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses.

Evaluation of what you have accomplished and what remains.

Evaluation of who you are and who you are becoming.

Evaluation of your followers: Their performance, their lives and more.

Evaluation is the platform upon which we build our plan for taking ourselves, our followers and our organizations to the next level and beyond.

The process of evaluation? There are many ways but here is a simple plan:

1. Find a quiet place. Reflection is best done away from distraction. It gives your mind space to think.
 2. Take a regular time. Whether it is once a week, every other week, once a month or quarter etc, be sure to set aside a regular time at regular intervals to evaluate and reflect.
 3. Look at what you have accomplished and where you are. Be specific. Be honest. Be ruthlessly truthful.
 4. Write it down. Keep a record. This gives you the chance at the next stage of evaluation to see exactly where you were last time. This keeps it as objective as possible.
 5. Look forward and set your next goal. Stretch yourself according to what works for you.
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Action Point: Take some time this week to evaluate where you are and to dream about what you will become! Be honest about where you are and specific in what you want to achieve.

For More Great Materials, Check Out Chris Widener's Website at:

www.ChrisWidener.com