

COACHING *for* LEADERS

The Leader's Greatest Return: Attracting, Developing, and Multiplying Leaders

by John Maxwell

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Dave's Reading Highlights

At age twenty-five, I discovered that everything rises and falls on leadership. I believed that truth with great certainty, and it propelled me to develop myself as a leader. Today my conviction is even greater, and it drives me to develop other leaders. That task is worthy of my best efforts, it adds the greatest value to others, and it gives me great joy. Developing leaders is the one activity that compounds a leader's time, influence, energy, vision, culture, finances, and mission.

One of my favorite quotes is by nineteenth-century steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. He said, "I think a fit epitaph for me would be, 'Here lies a man who knew how to get around men much cleverer than himself.'"⁸ The only surefire way to achieve something like that is to develop more leaders so that they reach their potential, and that's not something any leader can afford to delegate or abdicate. It takes a leader to show and grow another leader.

My friend Zig Ziglar used to say, "Success is the maximum utilization of the ability that you have."

For many years I've been friends with Bob Taylor, cofounder of Taylor Guitars. Bob makes some of the finest guitars in the world. What's his secret? He'll tell you it's the design and manufacturing process. He can make a guitar out of anything, and to prove it, he even once made a guitar out of scrap wood from an oak pallet. But that's not the norm. He uses the finest woods he can find, and buying them has become more and more difficult, as many of the best exotic woods are on the endangered species list or disappearing altogether. Bob says, "I'm living in the era where you cross the threshold of 'there's all the wood in the world' to 'there's not any more.'"2 In an interview he gave to the New York Times more than ten years ago, Bob said, "I used to buy Brazilian rosewood back in the 1970s at the lumber yard for \$2 a square foot. Now it's impossible for us to make a guitar out of it and ship it outside the US. If we do get a little bit of it, it's extremely expensive. The cutting of it has all but halted. Adirondack spruce is unavailable. Mahogany was so plentiful it was a commodity. Now only specialty cutters are getting it and the prices have gone through the roof. All these things happened just in my lifetime."3 That's been such a concern of his that he's dedicating the next twenty years of his life to initiatives to ensure that wood is sourced responsibly and to growing trees for the future—not his future, but the future of others—sixty, eighty, and a hundred years from now. Bob says, "We no longer live in a world of new frontiers and of wasteful use of our natural resources."4 Bob knows what he's looking for when it comes to potential guitar wood. If you want to be successful developing leaders, you need to know what potential leaders look like, and you need to be as tenacious as Bob Taylor is when he's sourcing wood for guitars. Every person you bring onto your team will make you either better or worse. And every leader you develop will do the same. Maybe that's why Amazon founder Jeff Bezos remarked, "I'd rather interview 50 people and not hire anyone than hire the wrong person."

1. Assessment of Needs: "What Is Needed?" Who are you looking for? If the mission of your organization were to climb trees, which would you rather do: hire a squirrel or train a horse to do the job? That answer is obvious. What is your organization trying to do? Do you possess a clear target? Do you know what you're going after? That

will tell you what kind of leaders you need to find to improve your organization. You'll never hit a target that you haven't identified.

2. Assets on Hand: "Who Has Leadership Potential Within the Organization?" Where is the best place to begin looking for potential leaders to develop? In your own organization or on your team. It just makes sense for so many reasons:

When I get to connect with someone I really admire and from whom I want to learn, I have one goal. To have a second meeting with that individual. But you can't just ask for that and expect to get it. You have to earn it. I try to do that by coming to the initial meeting over-prepared. I spend hours or even days thinking about the coming meeting. I do my homework and research the person. If he or she has written books, I read all of them. I carefully think through the questions I want to ask, and I write all of them down. In fact, I write more than I know I will have time to ask. When we meet, I let my enthusiasm for our meeting show, as well as my passion for the interests we have in common. And at the end of the meeting, I express my gratitude. I want everything I do to set me apart so that I have a chance to learn more from this person. Recently, I was invited to speak at a conference in Toronto by leadership expert and author Robin Sharma. For years I have admired his work, but I had never met him. I knew I was going to get some time with him, so I prepared for it, hoping it could lead to an ongoing friendship attracting leaders with him. I was already familiar with his teaching because I had read his books. So, I quoted him in my lecture. I let the audience know how much his work had added value to me. And then I stayed after my talk and signed books for anyone in the audience who asked me to. I did everything I could to go above and beyond what was expected. When we met, I could tell that Robin was grateful. And I'm glad to say that it wasn't our last time together.

All people are insecure. Give them confidence. • All people want to feel special. Compliment them. • All people want a bright future. Give them hope. • All people need to be understood. Listen to them. • All people want direction. Walk with them. • All people are selfish. Speak to their needs first. • All people get emotionally low. Encourage them.

- All people want to be included. Ask their opinion.
- All people want success. Help them win.
- All people want to be appreciated. Give them credit.

If you want to be effective at developing leaders, lead the way with questions. You can always give direction later. The more open-ended the questions, the more you can learn about how the potential leader thinks. And the more difficult, intuitive, or abstract the subject, the more natural leadership talent is needed to answer it.

Front-end questions set the agenda, while back-end questions maximize the agenda. Front-end questions encourage preparation, while back-end questions encourage reflection. Both kinds of questions increase understanding. And they pave the way for more effective leadership, and leadership development in others.

I once heard a joke that said we hear half of what is being said, listen to half of what we hear, understand half of that, believe half of that, and remember only half of that. If you translate those assumptions into an eight-hour workday, here is what it would mean: You spend about four hours listening. You hear about two hours of what is said. You actually listen to an hour of that. You understand only thirty minutes of that. You believe only fifteen minutes of that. And you remember only seven and a half minutes of it.

Eric Corona, one of the young leaders at the John Maxwell Company, was surprised by how that value played out when he was first hired by us. Eric said: As a highly motivated sales professional, it was a bit of a shock on my first day at the John Maxwell Company when I was informed that as a part of the onboarding process, I would not be engaging in any sales activity for the first two weeks in the office. This caused me some major anxiety, as I was ready to hit the ground running and start closing sales and producing for the company. Instead, my schedule was filled with one-on-one meetings with all the people across the multiple departments that I would be working with in my role. They were called “Get to Know You” meetings and the objective was to learn about each person.

The higher people go in leadership, the more isolated they often become. The day before Dwight Eisenhower became president of the United States, outgoing president Harry Truman is said to have told him, “This is the last day people will be honest with you.” He knew that with power and success, people too often tell you what you want to hear instead of what you need to hear. Worse, leaders begin to think they don’t need to listen anymore. They think everyone should listen to them. I’ve heard this referred to as the “bubble” presidents live in after they enter the White House.

As a young leader I didn’t have trouble keeping confidences, but I did have trouble listening. I was more interested in moving my agenda forward than listening to the people on my team. Only when a team member confronted me for my poor listening did I finally understand I had a problem. Ironically, I probably would have understood it earlier if I’d been listening to people. Others had probably been trying to tell me for a long time, but I just didn’t hear it. But when this team member finally got through to me, I realized what she was really telling me was that I wasn’t trustworthy. She believed her ideas, opinions, and feelings were not safe with me. I had to earn her trust. That started with becoming a better listener.

Now, back to the question I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. When people ask me how I motivate my people, my answer is that I don’t. I don’t try to push or pull people. Instead, I try to inspire people and help them find their own motivations. That means I must first find my own motivations and model the behavior I want to see in the people I lead. Good leaders inspire others only to the extent that they inspire themselves. Then I work to help them discover their own internal motivation. I encourage them to fan that spark into a roaring fire. Finally, I try to coach them to a place where tapping into their own internal Good leaders motivation is a habit.

1. Purpose—Leaders Want to Do What They Were Created to Do By far the strongest motivator I’ve seen in people is purpose. The human spirit comes alive when it finds a cause worth fighting for. With purpose, people’s have-to life turns into a want-to life. They live for a cause, not for applause.

Highlight [page 87]: According to Noonan: [Luce] told him . . . that “a great man is one sentence.” His leadership can be so well summed up in a single sentence that you don’t have to hear his name to know who’s being talked about. “He preserved the union and freed the slaves,” or, “He lifted us out of a great depression and helped to win a World War.” You didn’t have to be told “Lincoln” or “FDR.” She wondered what Kennedy’s sentence would be. She was telling him to concentrate, to know the great themes and demands of his time and focus on them.⁶ When I read something like that, it’s catalytic for me. It makes me immediately ask myself, “What is my one sentence?” Does it do the same to you? When I search myself for an answer, my one sentence is: I add value to leaders who multiply value to others. I want to be a catalyst for transformation, to help change leaders to change the world around them. What’s your sentence? You need to think about that, because you’ll be in a better place to help your leaders find their purpose if you already know your own and are living it.

2. Autonomy—Leaders Want the Freedom to Control Their Lives Over the years I’ve had the privilege of speaking to people in many direct-sales organizations all around the world. I always enjoy it because their enthusiasm is off the charts. Depending on the group and location, their products may be different and the cultures of the countries where they live and work may be unique, but they share one thing in common. They love having freedom—freedom to choose their business path, freedom to make their own decisions about how they work, and freedom to determine their personal potential. And I can tell you, when I visit a country where people had few freedoms in the past and they get a chance to experience a degree of autonomy, they seize the opportunity. And they are much happier and more productive as a result.

3. Relationships—Leaders Want to Do Things with Other People One of my great pleasures in life is getting to do something that matters with people who matter to me. This is more than just working with a team or increasing effectiveness by partnering with others. It’s true that in my book *Winning with People*, I wrote about the Partnership

Principle, which says that working together increases the odds of winning together.¹⁰ But I would The Partnership add to that, working together increases Principle: working the joy of working.

On this journey of significance I'm taking in life, some of the people who travel with me are new friends who bring new energy to my soul. Their contribution is such that I can barely remember what life was like without them. Others on the journey are faithful old friends who joined me when all I had was a dream. These friends bring security to my soul. All of us are striving for the finish line as a team, but the journey together is where the greatest joy is for me.

My mentor's words resonated with me. I've always enjoyed achievement. In fact, many years later, when StrengthsFinder came out and I took the test, I discovered that three of my top five strengths are achiever, activator, and maximizer, which explains why I am naturally inspired by making progress. But going back to my early years, it was also around that time that someone told me, "You're not good enough to stay the same." I don't remember the context. Maybe I was boasting about all that I'd accomplished. At the time, it got my attention. Today, it just makes me laugh at myself, because it's still true. As I look back at my life, I recognize that consistency has been the key to my progress. I wanted to improve, so I got intentional about learning and never quit. I didn't have any sudden big hits early in my career. I wasn't a home run hitter. My secret was to get up to bat every day and just try to get on base consistently. I think that's what most people need to do to turn their dreams into reality. There is no secret, no magic bullet, no shortcut. Most of us will never get some gigantic break that turns everything around. We need to grow in small, incremental steps. Read books. Attend seminars. Talk to people who know more than we do. Find mentors. Ask others to teach us or answer questions. As John Wooden used to say, make each day your masterpiece.¹¹ If you do that every day, day after day, your life can become a masterpiece.

5. Mastery—Leaders Want to Excel at Their Work The desire for personal and professional growth often leads to the next source of

motivation that inspires many people: the desire for mastery. No one can achieve mastery who is not continually growing.

Mastery is never fully realized by anyone. We all fall short. But striving for mastery allows us to continually push forward and improve. People who tap into this aspect of motivation know they'll never cross the finish line of perfection, but they're getting better all the time, and they find the pursuit of excellence fulfilling. That desire shapes what they achieve.

6. Money—Leaders Want to Be Financially Secure The last motivator I want to talk about is money. Radio comedian Fred Allen said, "There are many things more important than money. And they all cost money."¹⁵ That's a funny line. But while money is first on many people's list, it's last on mine. For me it's the lowest of all motivators, but maybe that's because I'm not hurting financially.

In my first leadership position, I relied on charisma and hard work to move the organization forward. I gathered followers. And I did nearly everything myself. I was young and energetic, so I was able to keep that up for the three years I spent in that position. But when I moved on to another organization, everything I had done fell apart. That's when I realized that the function of leadership isn't to gather more followers. It's to produce more leaders.

All the equipping models that I have practiced since 1974 have one thing in common: the Proximity Principle. I bring the people close to me to equip and invest in them. You can't do it from a distance. The closer potential leaders are to you, the more interactions they will have with you and the more lessons they will receive.

I've been told that in hospital emergency rooms, nurses have a saying, "Watch one, do one, teach one." In other words, a new nurse follows an experienced nurse and watches what he or she does. Then the new nurse does the same thing. He or she is expected to turn around and teach someone else. In the fast pace of the medical profession, nurses are encouraged to jump right in on the job, practice new skills, and then pass them on. Few things cement

learning like actually doing the work yourself, hands on. Theory and instruction alone produce limited results. The moment people get involved, their abilities rise quickly.

And over the years, I've discovered that developing other leaders can be hit-and-miss. Trial and error can't be avoided. And that's okay, because the downside of not empowering is much greater than the relatively small losses that come from giving people a chance to really lead.

There are certainly a lot of different ways to release people to take on a challenge. The Center for Organizational Effectiveness in Cincinnati created a progressive process for releasing people. It's based on wisdom of knowing what to do; the will to do what needs to be done; and the wherewithal to do it. With these three variables in mind, they identify six levels of empowerment, moving from least to most empowering. LEVEL 1: Look into it. Report. I'll decide what to do. (Least empowering.) LEVEL 2: Look into it. Report alternatives with pros and cons and your recommendation. LEVEL 3: Look into it. Let me know what you intend to do, but don't do it unless I say yes. LEVEL 4: Look into it. Let me know what you intend to do and do it unless I say no. LEVEL 5: Take action. Let me know what you did. LEVEL 6: Take action. No further contact required. (Most empowered.)

What Mark Wants from Me 1. Proximity—he wants me to be available to him. 2. Authenticity—he wants me to be real and speak honestly. 3. Respect—he wants me to value his opinions and effort. 4. Significance—he wants opportunities to add value to others. 5. Belief—he wants me to believe he can lead with excellence. 6. Wisdom—he wants me to share the lessons I've learned from difficult experiences. 7. Empowerment—he wants me to give him authority as well as responsibility. 8. Influence—he wants me to lend my voice when needed. 9. Platform—he wants me to offer him access to others.

What I Want from Mark 1. Heart—I want him to love people. 2. Production—I want him to get results, not give excuses. 3. Energy—I want to see passion in him for what he does. 4. Team buy-in—I want to see him stretch and discover how high his influence can go. 5.

Trust—I want to always know I can trust him. 6. A teachable spirit—I want him to be open to learning and improving. 7. Emotional strength—I want him to be able to carry the heavy load with me. 8. Reliability—I want to be able to count on him when it counts. 9. Protection—I want him to love me unconditionally and have my back.

Competent mentors possess a credibility that comes from both knowing and doing. For this reason, they can help people evolve over time through action as well as knowledge. If you're seeking a mentor, look for credibility. If you plan to be a mentor, develop it. And when you mentor others, do so only in your areas of proven success. As your credibility grows, you can expand the areas in which you mentor others.

There's another implication to the importance of a mentor and mentee sharing strengths: everyone needs more than one mentor. No one does everything well, and no single person shares all of your strengths. I seek out different people to help me develop different areas of my life. You should too. Never expect to become a be-all mentor to anyone. You can cover a lot of ground as a mentor with beginners. But when mentoring higher-level leaders, you need to specialize.

Highlight [page 181]: We will maintain an ROI agreement. Relationships don't last when they become one-sided. If that happens, the one doing all the giving starts to resent or regret the relationship. Mentoring is meant to give a return on investment to both people. When both people benefit, the relationship is life-giving. When they don't, somebody will soon want out of the relationship. Every time we meet, both of us need to feel that the experience was rewarding. If not, either of us can say it's run its course, and we can walk away at any time without blame or shame.

We will make each other better. Coming together with this sort of positive anticipation sets the tone for the experience. The person being mentored expects to be made better. But in the best relationships, the mentor gets better too. That requires both people to humbly bring something to the table. If they do, it becomes a

wonderful growing experience. I recognize that there is more than one good way of seeing and doing things, so it's wise to expect everyone to be my teacher. You should too. That's the whole point of mentoring.

You must mentor other leaders. My whole reason for mentoring is to pass on what I learn. As I've said, my purpose is to add value to leaders who multiply value to others. I know of no better way to multiply value than for those I mentor to mentor others. The magic of mentoring is multiplication. When the young leaders I'm mentoring express a feeling of responsibility to help and develop others, I see that as maturity. It makes my day as a mentor when someone I mentor introduces me to those they are mentoring. That's worth celebrating.

I will be a safe person for you to share. Good mentors are trustworthy and build a foundation of trust. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus call trust "the glue that binds followers and leaders together."⁷ Building trust may take time, but it's important because the depth of the mentoring will be determined by the vulnerability of the person being mentored. My part is to be real with mentees, allow every emotion, be willing to answer any question, and hold everything they say in confidence. Trust is a result of authenticity, not perfection. Their part is to be real with me, not hide, and be open. They can expect me to be safe.

4. Care Enough to Have Crucial Conversations Good mentors don't hesitate to have difficult conversations with the people they mentor. They deal with the "elephants" in the room even when others won't. More often than not, the best time to have a crucial conversation is now.

One of the leaders who helped me and many others was Jack Hayford. Not only did he show me many of the leadership ropes, but when I had a heart attack in my fifties, he called me to say that he was willing to fill in for any speaking commitments I couldn't keep during my recovery. What a gift.

In chapter 5, on equipping leaders, I described how good leaders work themselves out of a job. One of the key transitions to become a reproducer of leaders is to focus less on what you can accomplish personally and more on what you can accomplish through others.

When I talked to Sheri Riley so that I could write about her story in chapter 8, she explained the difference between an advisor, a mentor, and a sponsor. She said that an advisor speaks on your behalf. She is an advocate. A mentor helps and guides you by pouring into you. But a sponsor actually opens doors for you so that you can walk through them to be successful. Essentially, a sponsor says, “Here’s the opportunity,” and all you have to do is show up.

My mentor John Wooden was the humblest leader I have ever known. One of the things he used to say was, “Talent is God-given; be humble. Fame is man-given; be thankful. Conceit is self-given; be careful.”¹² Those are great words of warning for leaders.

There is no substitute for a lack of giftedness. There’s an old saying among coaches: you can’t put in what God has left out. Or as an old coaching friend, Lou Holtz, put it in a quip he once made over lunch, “I’ve coached good players and I’ve coached bad players. I’m a better coach with better players.”

Let’s say you have ten people on your team. Not everyone has the same production potential. I’m sure you recognize that. The top two probably produce the majority of results for the team. Who do you think has the greatest possibility of producing the greatest return for your investment in them? The top two leaders. Why? Because they can help others become more productive. That’s why I invest in them. If I have ten people on my team, I invest 80 percent of my time and effort into my top two—my top 20 percent. I add value to them, so they can multiply value to others. I started applying this principle to my teams forty years ago, and it transformed my leadership. Not only did it conserve my energy, because I was spending less time developing fewer leaders, but it multiplied my effectiveness because the leaders I chose gave me the highest return. It was multiplication by subtraction.

It's dangerous to think you've arrived as a leader. As someone once quipped, today's peacocks are tomorrow's feather dusters. If you want to keep leading, you need to keep growing, and few things stretch a leader like leading growing leaders.