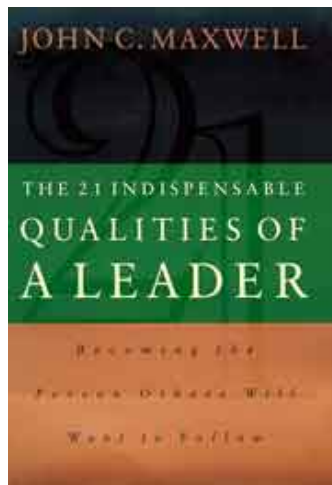


# **The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader**

## **Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow**



By  
**John C. Maxwell**

Thomas Nelson Inc 1999  
ISBN 0-7852-7440-5 Hard cover  
ISBN 0-7852-6796-4 Paper back  
161 pages

Businesssummaries.com is a business book summaries service. Every week, it sends out to subscribers a 9- to 12-page summary of a best-selling business book chosen from among the hundreds of books printed out in the United States. For more information, please go to <http://www.bizsum.com>.

## The big idea

Leadership is an art form. To become a good leader, you have to begin working on improving yourself. Filled with enlightening anecdotes that illustrate the qualities of the world's greatest leaders, this must-read for any entrepreneur, manager, or executive will bring valuable lessons to push you in the right direction towards the fulfillment of your leadership roles.

### 1. Character

Be a piece of the Rock

- Adversity pushes a leader to make a choice. She chooses according to her values, even if that choice may bring negative consequences.
- To develop your character, you need to walk your talk. Integrity can be shown in your actions. Do your actions match your words?
- Character is a choice. We may all have unique talents or gifts, and though we cannot choose our family or upbringing, we can however, choose the manner and attitude we have when faced with a challenge.
- Weak character symptoms are arrogance, aloneness, recklessness, and adultery.
- A person with character does not cut corners or compromise.
- Face the music and apologize sincerely to those whom you have wronged.
- Rebuild your character after facing up to your past actions.

### 2. Charisma

- The big secret behind charisma is a genuine love of life. Leaders with charisma are never despondent, but they embrace life with a passion. People love to follow someone charged with passion.
- People also love a leader who makes them feel good about themselves. If you appreciate other people and show them you want to help them achieve their potential, they will return your respect and love.
- Give people hope. Sometimes it is the only thing they have left.
- Share your wisdom, resources, and time. Devote an hour to the local children's library and tell stories to them. Give lectures to those who want to follow your career path.
- Nobody wants to follow a leader who thinks he is better than everyone else, or is uncomfortable with himself. People dislike moody, unpredictable leaders, as well as cynical leaders and the very tiresome perfectionist.
- To improve your charisma, change your focus from yourself to others. Play the first impression game. When you meet someone for the first time, try your best to make a good impression. Also make it your long-term goal to share yourself and help others grow personally and professionally.

### 3. Commitment

- Commitment is what separates the doers from the dreamers. The only real measure of commitment is action. Commitment has its own rewards, opening the doors to achievement that otherwise would have remained closed.
- When it comes to commitment there are the cop-outs, or people without any goals and do not commit. The holdouts don't know if they can reach their goals, so they are afraid to commit. The dropouts start toward a goal but quit when the going gets tough. The all-outs are the people who set goals, commit to them, and pay the price to reach them.
- Measure your commitment by spending a few hours figuring out where your money, time, and energy go everyday. Another way to get committed to your goals is to make your plans public and then you will be more compelled to follow through with them.

### 4. Communication

- Communication is key to good leadership. Good communicators can take a complex message and simplify it for everyone to understand. People need to connect to you, and along with charisma, communication is the most powerful weapon a leader can have.
- Simplify your message. Study your audience. Let yourself be fired up with conviction and seek a response.
- Examine a memo or letter you have written recently. Were you clear as a bell? Were you direct and simple or did you use all kinds of superfluous words? If you can say it all in one line, do so.
- Refocus your attention to the people you need to communicate to. Meet them where they are, and think about how it is to be in their shoes.

### 5. Competence

- To cultivate quality, the first thing you need to do is become more responsible. This means showing up when you're expected, and regardless of how you feel that day.
- Devote yourself to continuous improvement. The person who knows how will always have a job, but the person who knows why will always be the boss.
- Choose to perform at a consistently high level of excellence.
- Go the extra mile.
- Inspire others to do more and take the organization to new levels of excellence.
- Never be satisfied with good enough.
- Don't just make things happen, make things happen when they really count.
- Focus. Focus. Focus.
- Redefine the standards and demand more of yourself.
- Find 3 things you can do to improve your professional skills and dedicate the time and money to follow through.

## 6. Courage

- Courage is doing what you are afraid to do.
- Courage is standing for what you feel is right, even when all around you are opposed.
- Courage is contagious.
- Courage in leadership compels people to do the right thing.
- Your life expands in proportion to your courage. Fear limits a leader.
- Get out of your comfort zone and take risks.

## 7. Discernment

Madame Marie Curie's intelligence and discernment allowed her to understand and discover many things that have made a positive impact on our world. Discernment is an indispensable quality for a leader who desires to maximize effectiveness.

- Discernment is the ability to find the root of the matter, solve a problem, evaluate options and allows you to multiply opportunities.
- Analyze your past successes to see how you used your powers of discernment to get through a problem.
- Learn how other people think.
- Listen to your gut.

## 8. Focus

Tony Gwynn devotes a huge percentage of his time and effort to reviewing baseball videotapes of his batting. It is his intense focus on his performance that has made him the greatest hitter in the last 50 years. Gwynn has batted over 300 in every season, people like him have cultivated a kind of concentration unknown to most people.

- Focus 70% on your strengths
- Focus 20% on learning new things to improve your game.
- Focus 5% on areas of weakness
- Delegate your areas of weakness
- Work on yourself, your priorities
- Work with your contemporaries.
- Divided focus works against you.

## 9. Generosity

When Elisabeth Elliot's husband was killed by tribesmen in Ecuador, she could have just packed her bags and gone home. Instead, she stayed on as a missionary and eventually had the opportunity to help the Aucan Indians, even two of the seven men who had killed her husband.

- Be grateful for whatever you have
- Put people first
- Don't allow the desire for possessions to control you
- Regard money as a resource. Use it to accomplish things of value.
- Develop the habit of giving.

- Put your money to work for something that will outlive you.
- Find someone to mentor.

## 10. Initiative

In 1947, Lester Wunderman was arbitrarily fired from his advertising job in New York. Lester knew he could learn a lot from the head of the agency, Max Sackheim, and so continued to report to the office and worked without pay. After one month, Sackheim rehired him because he had shown unique initiative and had wanted the job so much. Wunderman proved he would do it not for money but for the love of it. He went on to become one of the most successful advertising men of the century. He is known as the father of direct marketing.

- Good leaders know what they want. They don't wait for others to act.
- Good leaders push themselves to act and find their own motivation.
- Good leaders take more risks. They know the biggest risk of all is inaction.
- Good leaders make more mistakes. They fail forward.
- To cultivate your initiative, change your mind-set.
- Don't wait for opportunity to knock, you have to go out and look for it.
- Take the next step and don't stop until you've done everything you can to make it happen.

## 11. Listening

If you think listening is not a skill and can't make you a successful leader, then watch Oprah Winfrey. From a local Chicago talk show host, she is now one of the most powerful women in the entertainment industry. Oprah Winfrey learns from people around her, and that comes from being a good listener.

- You have two purposes for listening: to connect with people and to learn from them.
- Listen to your followers, your customers, your competitors, your mentors
- Change your schedule and spend time listening to these people mentioned above
- Meet people on their turf. Find common ground.
- Listen for what is not being said. Be perceptive.

## 12. Passion

- Passion is the first step to achievement. A great desire brings great results.
- Passion increases your willpower. If you want something badly enough, you will find the willpower to achieve it.
- Passion changes you. You become a more productive, dedicated person once you've found your true passion.
- Passion makes the impossible possible. A leader with passion and skill will go very far and achieve big things.
- How passionate are you about your life and work?
- Return to your first love. Maybe you've gone a bit off track and need to refocus. What activity as a child did you find yourself so absorbed in, hour after hour?
- Associate with people of passion, it is contagious. Schedule time with them so they can infect you with it.

### 13. Positive attitude

It took Thomas Edison ten thousand tries to find the right materials for the incandescent light bulb, but he didn't see them as failures. People who are so close to success don't realize it, because they simply give up after the 99<sup>th</sup> try, when the hundredth may be The One that will catapult them into the history books. Maintain a positive attitude if you want to achieve great things. Where would we all be without Edison's light bulb today?

- Your attitude is a choice.
- Your attitude determines your actions.
- Your people are a mirror of your attitude.
- Maintaining a good attitude is easier than regaining one.
- Feed on positive and motivational material. Read books and listen to motivational tapes. Become a more positive thinker.
- Achieve a goal every day. Make small steps towards your big goal and this will foster a positive attitude in you, naturally.
- Write it on your wall. Put it where you can see it everyday.

### 14. Problem solving

Sam Walton of Wal-Mart was an excellent leader who was able to solve problems and change rather than go out of business. He rose to every challenge and while other retailers complained about the competition, Walton solved his problems with tenacity and creativity.

- Anticipate problems
- Accept the truth
- See the big picture
- Handle one thing at a time
- Don't give up on a major goal when you're down
- Go out looking for problems to solve
- Develop a method
- Surround yourself with problem solvers

### 15. Relationships

- This could make or break your career and your personal life
- Understanding people is essential to leadership
- People are selfish, they want to feel special, and need encouragement
- Love people
- Help people
- Try to do something for friends and colleagues
- Repair a hurting relationship

### 16. Responsibility

- Work harder than you normally do. Stretch your hours. Doing the bare minimum of 8 hours a day means you are only in survival mode.
- Go the extra mile.
- Go for excellence and quality.
- Deliver, regardless of the situation.
- Hang in there despite difficulties. Ask for help if you must.
- Admit what's not good enough.
- Find better tools: take classes, read books, find a mentor.

- Do whatever it takes to get the job done and then some.

## **17. Security**

- Insecure leaders don't provide security for others. They cannot impart what they do not have.
- Insecure leaders take more from people than they give.
- They limit their best people and feel threatened by them.
- They limit the organization.
- Know yourself.
- Give away the credit.
- Get help if you cannot overcome insecurity on your own.

## **18. Self-discipline**

- The first person you need to lead is you.
- Develop and follow your priorities
- Make a disciplined lifestyle your goal
- Challenge your excuses
- Remove rewards until the job is done
- Stay focused on results

## **19. Servanthood**

- A true leader serves people.
- Put others ahead of your own agenda.
- Possess the confidence to serve
- Initiate service to others
- Servant leaders are not position-conscious
- A true leader serves out of love
- Perform small acts of kindness for others
- Get to know your employees or followers as people.
- Sign up for volunteer work

## **20. Teachability**

- Cure yourself of destination disease. Some people stop growing after they reach a goal. Keep moving and add new goals after you've achieved your initial ones.
- Overcome your success. Do not become complacent.
- Pay the price for success.
- Trade in your pride. To be able to grow you need to give up your pride.
- Never pay twice for the same mistake. If you don't learn, you will make the same mistake next year.
- Try something new.
- Learn in your area of strength.
- Observe how you react to mistakes.

## **21. Vision**

- The future belongs to those who see possibilities before they become obvious.
- Vision starts from within.

- Vision draws on your history.
- Vision meets others' needs.
- Vision helps you gather resources.
- Listen to your inner voice
- If you are itching to change your world, go ahead and do it.
- You need a team to fulfill your vision.
- Write down your vision. See if it is worth pursuing, and once you decide to, give it all you've got.