

Maxwell on leadership... a few thoughts

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

I've been frequently quoted as saying,

'Leadership is a lifestyle of commitment, not a label. If people follow you – you are a leader. If not, you only have a label.'

Over the years I have learned a few '*lessons on leadership*' – many the hard way by making mistakes, and taking some un-seen detours and dead-ends. Some thru the successful achievement of teams I have had the privilege of leading.

More recently, I have been sharing my ideas and lessons learned. I have been devouring the thoughts and ideas of other speakers and writers to add to my understanding of this essential but illusive success skill.

'People buy into a leader first, then the vision.' John C. Maxwell

You may have heard the name John C. Maxwell over the years. John is an expert on the subject of leadership, having written about it in some 30 books, and spoken to millions around the world. His '*The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*,' is a business best seller.

John shared some *solid* ideas on the building blocks of a successful personality and their importance to us as leaders: The ability to get along with others (*relationship building*), ability to share their vision (*equipping*), and positive attitude and leadership ability. John goes on to stress that although all of these traits are important, '*everything rises and falls on leadership.*'

If you want to be effective in your career or business - hone your leadership skills. Often according to John, 'Leadership ability is the lid that determines your effectiveness.'

(Irrefutable law #1) Leadership is not honed or built overnight. According to Maxwell, "They are developed daily by reading, listening, attending workshops and conferences, and sharing ideas.

Successful leaders are learners. And the learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline and perseverance. **The goal each day must be to get better, to build on the previous day's progress."**

According to Maxwell, 'All great leaders share the ability to build and lead teams. **One is too small a number to achieve greatness.** Building a team is difficult, but you cannot do anything significant without one. A group is not a team.

A team shares a vision, mindset and heart. The compounding of great ideas happens in a team. And a great idea is the result of several good ideas."

A team is not a team without a leader they can trust and follow! Leadership functions on trust. Trust is the foundation upon which every relationship – at work, at home, in the community or anywhere else – is built.

Trust is earned and according to Maxwell you only receive it when you have these **three key attributes: character, competence and consistency.** When these mesh together you begin to build trust and receive trust from others.

A closer look at these three key attributes reveals or underscores the fact they are built or developed over time. Leadership is a '**process of progress**' towards increased trust and responsibility.

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You keep earning trust as you keep learning. Trust is a fragile thing and once lost very difficult to recover.

Leadership is a lifestyle of commitment to increased service and guidance of those you have under your care. Warren Bennis says, *'without trust, the leader cannot function.'*

John shared 6 steps he felt would help keep you on track in your leadership journey and keep you from eroding or losing the trust of your team. Here are my reflections on those steps filtered through my own experience:

- **Focus on shared goals more than personal agendas.** When it comes to trust, it is not about you. You are leading the company, office, or team for the benefit of everyone. People will not follow you if it becomes transparent that you are in it for yourself. What is in it for them?
- **Stay away from politics.** Make sure everyone knows you cannot be bought or compromised. Keep this a clear and visible focus. The quickest way to derail your leadership is to get entangled in factions or frictions. Leadership is empowering not entangling.
- **Do the 'right' thing regardless of personal risk.** Being a leader means sometimes you have to grit your teeth and take the pain when doing the right thing causes you to get hurt. That is the essence of leadership – choosing to do what is right regardless of the cost. This can be your biggest challenge and test. Those who you seek to lead will be watching and judging your ability to lead by *'how'* you act and what you choose. Choose wisely!
- **Be accountable to others.** Create an unofficial advisory board of trusted colleagues or mentors to keep tabs on how you're doing in all of these steps. Don't rely on your own judgement as the only way to keep you on track. The wisdom of many can be a guide to the

leader. I have several trusted advisors as well as a success team who help keep me on focus and on track. I value their insights and inputs tremendously.

- **Follow the Golden Rule.** Treat people the way you want to be treated. It's simple, and it still works after all these years. More so for leaders and aspiring leaders. This is so simple, and yet so difficult for many who would seek to lead. **You lead by example, if you would lead at all!**
- **Make sure what you say matches what you do.** Consistency and congruity working in tandem to underscore and demonstrate your credibility and competence. The best way to earn and maintain the trust of your team is to *'say what you mean and mean what you say'* – and then model it! When people see with their own eyes that you are trustworthy with both your words and your actions they are more inclined to want to be a part of your team. This is the foundation for success in leadership!

Being a leader is not easy; otherwise everyone would be doing it, effectively.

Everyone who calls himself or herself a leader is not proven to be one in fact. Many who don't 'officially' take on the label, earn the respect and the position in people's minds and actions in spite of not choosing the limelight.

People will follow you when you prove to them you are trustworthy of their commitment to you and the vision you share. But remember John's advice... **'People buy into the leader first, then the vision.'**

Take a few minutes to reflect on the **three key attributes: character, competence and consistency.**

Be totally honest with yourself: how would you rate in each of these areas?

- Would you see areas of improvement in your leadership skills?
- What would those you lead tell you about your rating in each of these key attributes?
- Perhaps chatting with your trusted colleagues and specifically asking them to give you their insight and feedback would be beneficial. Ask for their honest feedback – and heed it to grow in your leadership role.

Leadership is a life long journey.

Once you make the commitment, the path lies before you, beckoning you, teasing you, taunting you, testing you each step of the way. The journey can be challenging at times, after all you are dealing with people and the personalities that come with their involvement on your team.

The vision, the goal, the chance to make a difference is the *'heart'* that keeps your leadership blood pumping.

Enjoy the journey!

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Bob 'Idea Man' Hooley is a sought after productivity strategist, creativity catalyst and idea farmer), who regularly writes for North American consumer, association and trade journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of ten success books, a mini-book series, four success systems and an e-book series. Bob was the 48th person in the history of Toastmasters International to earn their coveted professional level Accredited Speaker designation. Bob is a motivational, business and association keynote conference speaker and executive leadership trainer and coach). He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers. **Visit his website for additional leadership, business and career development articles like this one:** www.ebusinesssuccess.biz