

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership  
Follow Them and People Will Follow You  
- John C. Maxwell -

The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, recently added this book to three others that he recommends every Naval officer read. I've tried to summarize the key points of every chapter for those of you who don't have time to read the book or simply don't have immediate access to it.

Maxwell uses historical figures throughout the book to demonstrate the key leadership traits/laws he is explaining. However he does not articulate how those historical figures came to acquire these traits.

John C. Maxwell asks that you keep the four following ideas in mind as you read the chapter summaries that follow:

1. The 21 irrefutable laws can be learned.
2. The laws can stand alone.
3. The laws carry consequences with them.
4. These laws are the foundation of leadership.

#### Chapter 1 – Law of the Lid

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

Leadership ability is the lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness. The lower an individual's ability to lead, the lower the lid on his potential. The higher the leadership, the greater the effectiveness. Your leadership ability – for better or for worse – always determines your effectiveness and the potential impact of your organization.

Maxwell uses the McDonald brothers as example of weak leadership putting a lid on their ability to succeed. The brothers started the McDonald's hamburger chain but lacked the leadership to take it to national prominence. Ray Kroc had a vision for a national hamburger chain and bought the brothers' business and turned McDonald's into the successful giant restaurant chain it is today..

Ray Kroc's lid was high and obviously the McDonald's leadership lid was low.

Maxwell does not directly explain what makes the McDonalds' leadership lid low and Ray Kroc's leadership lid high.

#### Chapter 2 – The Law of Influence

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

If you don't have influence, you will NEVER be able to lead others.

The five myths about leadership:

1. The management myth
  - Leading and managing are not the same. Leadership is about influencing people to follow while management is about maintaining systems and processes. A leader can bring about positive change, a manager cannot.
2. The entrepreneur myth
  - People may be buying what an entrepreneur is selling but they aren't necessarily following him.
3. The knowledge myth
  - Knowledge may be power but that power does not necessarily equate to leadership.

4. The pioneer myth
  - The pioneer out front isn't necessarily the leader. A leader not only needs to be out front, but also needs to have people intentionally following and acting on his vision.
5. The position myth
  - It's not the position that makes the leader, it's the leader that makes the position.

The very essence of all power to influence lies in getting the other person to participate. If you can't influence others, they won't follow you. And if they won't follow, then you are not a leader.

#### Chapter 3 – The Law of Process

##### Leadership Develops Daily, Not in a Day

Spend your life building your leadership worth. It can't be built in a day. The secret is found in your daily agenda.

Leadership is complicated. It has many facets: respect, experience, emotional strength, people skills, discipline, vision, momentum, and timing – the list goes on.

Leaders are learners. The learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline, and perseverance. Build each day on the previous day's progress.

The four phases of leadership growth:

Phase 1 – I don't know what I don't know

- Try to think of yourself as a leader and then work to become one.

Phase 2 – I know what I don't know

- Recognize that you may not know what you need to know to lead effectively and start learning.

Phase 3 – I grow and know and it starts to show

- Recognize your lack of skill and begin the daily discipline of personal growth in leadership.

Phase 4 – I simply go because of what I know

- Your dedication to improving your leadership ability on a daily basis begins to pay off and your ability to lead becomes almost automatic.

No matter where you're starting from in the leadership continuum, you can get better. It really is about daily preparation.

#### Chapter 4 – The Law of Navigation

##### Anyone Can Steer the Ship, But It Takes a Leader to Chart the Course

Planning is critical to success. Forethought and attention to detail are important.

Followers need leaders to effectively navigate for them.

A true leader needs to see the way ahead.

Before leaders embark on a journey with their people, they go through a process in order to give the trip the best chance of being successful:

- they draw on past experience

- they listen to what others have to say
- they examine the conditions before making commitments
- they make sure their conclusions represent both faith and fact

Chart the course with a navigation strategy

- **P**redetermine a Course of Action
- **L**ay out your Goals
- **A**djust Your Priorities
- **N**otify Key Personnel
  
- **A**llow time for Acceptance
- **H**ead into Action
- **E**xpect Problems
- **A**lways Point to the Successes
- **D**aily Review Your Plan

Major barriers to successful planning are fear of change, ignorance, uncertainty about the future and lack of imagination.

When you prepare well, you convey confidence and trust to the people.

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

When the Real Leader Speaks, People Listen

The real leader holds the power, not just the position.

If you have to tell your people you are their leader, you probably aren't.

You remember the Financial Services Company E. F. Hutton. Their motto was, "When E.F. Hutton speaks, people listen." That is what Maxwell refers to as the leadership truth the Law of E. F. Hutton. Because when the real leader speaks, people do listen.

#### POSITIONAL LEADERS

#### REAL LEADERS

Speak first

Speak later

Need the influence of the real leader to get things done

Need only their own influence to get things done

Influence only the other positional leaders

Influence everyone in the room

The real test of leadership isn't where you start out. It's where you end up that counts.

People become real leaders because of:

1. Character – Who they are
  - Leadership begins with the inner person. People can sense the depth of your character
2. Relationships – Who they know
  - Develop relationships, deep ones.

3. Knowledge – What they know
  - Information is vital to a leader. Get a keen grasp of the facts. Do lots of homework.
4. Intuition- What they feel
  - Leaders have to deal with countless intangibles. More on this in the Law of Intuition.
5. Experience – Where they've been
  - Past success will lead to future success.
6. Past success – What they've done
  - Nothing speaks the volumes that a good track record does.
7. Ability – What they can do
  - Your followers are interested in what you can get done. Once they believe you can no longer deliver, they will stop listening.

## Chapter 6 – The Law of Solid Ground

### Trust Is the Foundation of Leadership

When it comes to leadership, you just can't take shortcuts, no matter how long you've been leading your people.

To build trust, a leader must exemplify these qualities: competence, connection, and character. People will forgive occasional mistakes based on ability, especially if they can see that you're growing as a leader. But they won't trust someone who has slips in character.

Character and leadership credibility always go hand in hand. Character makes trust possible. And trust makes leadership possible. That is the Law of Solid Ground.

Character communicates consistency and respect. Leaders earn respect by making sound decisions, admitting their mistakes, and putting what's best for their followers and the organization ahead of their personal agendas.

A leader's good character builds trust among his followers. But when a leader breaks trust, he forfeits his ability to lead.

Trust is the foundation of leadership. Violate the Law of Solid Ground, and you're through as a leader.

## Chapter 7 – The Law of Respect

### People Naturally Follow Leaders Stronger Than Themselves

When people respect someone as a person, they admire him. When they respect him as a friend, they love him. When they respect him as a leader, they follow him.

People don't follow others by accident. They follow individuals whose leadership they respect.

The more leadership ability a person has, the more quickly he recognizes leadership-or the lack of it-in others.

Occasionally a strong leader may choose to follow someone weaker than himself. But when that happens, it's for a reason. The stronger leader may do it out of respect for the person's office or past accomplishments. Or he may be following the chain of command. In general though, followers are attracted to people who are better leaders than themselves. That is the Law of Respect.

## Chapter 8 – The Law of Intuition

### Leaders Evaluate Everything with a Leadership Bias

The Law of Intuition is based on facts plus instinct and other intangible factors. Leadership intuition is often the factor that separates the greatest leaders from the merely good ones.

A leader has to read the situation and know instinctively what play to call.

Leaders evaluate everything with a leadership bias – a bias for action.

Leaders read situations, resources, people and themselves.

Three levels of leadership intuition

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

Leaders see problems, evaluate them and begin resolving them almost immediately.

## Chapter 9 – The Law of Magnetism

### Who You Are Is Whom You Attract

Birds of a feather flock together. Who you attract as a leader is not determined by what you want. It is determined by who you are.

It is possible for a leader to go out and recruit people unlike himself, but those are not the people he will naturally attract.

Look at the people in your inner circle and you will see that the people who follow you share common ground in several of these key areas:

1. Attitude
2. Generation
3. Background
4. Values
5. Life experience
6. Leadership ability

The better leader you are, the better leaders you will attract.

Who you are is whom you will attract. That is the Law of Magnetism.

## Chapter 10 – The Law of Connection

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

Learn how to truly connect with people at their level.

You can't move people to action unless you first move them with emotion. The heart comes before the head.

The stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the follower will want to help the leader.

Connect with people one at a time.

Some leaders have problems with the Law of Connection because they believe that connecting is the responsibility of the follower. That is especially true of positional leaders. They often think, *I'm the boss. I have the position. These are my employees. Let them come to me.*

It is the leader's job to initiate connection with the people.

When a leader has done the work to connect with his people, you can see it in the way the organization functions. The vision of the leader becomes the aspiration of the people.

To lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart.

#### Chapter 11 – The Law of the Inner Circle

##### A Leader's Potential Is Determined by Those Closest to Him

When you have the right staff, potential skyrockets.

Maxwell divided his new staff into three groups according to their ability to lead and deliver results. Then he systematically began replacing them with stronger leaders, beginning with the bottom third first.

Leaders find greatness in a group and help the members find it in themselves.

Leaders should try to bring five types of people to their inner circle:

1. Potential value – those who raise up themselves
2. Positive value – those who raise morale in the organization
3. Personal value – those who raise up the leader
4. Production value – those who raise up others
5. Proven value – those who raise up people who raise up other people

Surround yourself with the best people possible. That's the Law of the Inner Circle.

#### Chapter 12 – The Law of Empowerment

##### Only Secure Leaders Give Power to Others

Maxwell describes Henry Ford as the antithesis of the empowering leader. Henry Ford built the Model T and he was not the least bit interested in changing or improving it. Even with all its success, Henry Ford consistently undermined the Ford Company executives and nearly killed the company.

Henry Ford's grandson, Henry Ford II, a Navy man, returned to the company and eventually became president of Ford Motor Company. The company had not made a profit in fifteen years. Ford gathered a group of men who had worked with him in the War Department and turned the company around. But like his grandfather, Henry Ford II undermined the leadership of the company executives.

The people's capacity to achieve is determined by their leader's ability to empower. Give your people the resources, authority and responsibility to succeed and turn them loose to achieve. Only empowered people can reach their potential.

Admiral James Bond Stockdale said, "Leadership must be based on goodwill...It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers." Give your power to your people.

The greatest things happen only when you give others the credit.

A key to empowering others is high belief in people. Enlarging others makes you bigger.

Chapter 13 – The Law of Reproduction  
It Takes a Leader to Raise Up a Leader

Leaders develop leaders; followers cannot develop leaders.

We teach what we know – we reproduce what we are.

Spend time with the best leaders you can find. The only way you will be able to develop other leaders is to become a better leader yourself.

To do this:

1. See the big picture
2. Attract potential leaders
3. Create an eagle environment where a leader casts a vision, offers incentives, encourages creativity, allows risks and provides accountability.

Chapter 14 – The Law of Buy-in  
People Buy Into the Leader, Then the Vision

The leader finds the dream and then the people. The people find the leader and then the dream. People follow worthy leaders who promote worthwhile causes. People buy into the leader first and then the leader's vision.

LEADER	+	VISION	=	RESULT
Don't Buy In		Don't Buy In		Get Another Leader
Don't Buy In		Buy In		Get Another Leader
Buy In		Don't Buy In		Get Another Vision
Buy In		Buy In		Get Behind the Leader

As a leader, you don't earn any points for failing in a noble cause. You don't get credit for being "right". Your success is measured by your ability to actually take the people where they need to go. But you can only do that if the people first buy into you as a leader. That's the reality of the Law of Buy-In.

Chapter 15 – The Law of Victory  
Leaders Find a Way for the Team to Win

Victorious leaders feel the alternative to winning is totally unacceptable, so they figure out what must be done to achieve victory, and then they go after it with everything at their disposal.

Victorious leaders are unable to accept defeat.

Three components of Victory

1. Unity of vision
2. Diversity of skill
3. A leader dedicated to victory and raising players to their potential

Chapter 16 – The Law of the Big Mo  
Momentum Is a Leader's Best Friend

All leaders face the challenge of creating change in an organization. The key is momentum – what Maxwell calls the "Big Mo".

It takes a leader to create momentum. Followers catch it.

Momentum makes leaders look better than they are.  
Momentum helps followers perform better than they are  
Momentum is easier to steer than to start  
Momentum is the most powerful change agent

#### Chapter 17 – The Law of Priorities

Leaders Understand That Activity Is Not Necessarily Accomplishment

Leaders never grow to a point where they no longer need to prioritize.

The three Rs

1. What is required?
2. What gives the greatest return?
3. What brings the greatest reward?

Recognize that activity does not necessarily mean accomplishment.

Take time to reassess your leadership priorities. Are you focused on the few things that bring the highest reward?

#### Chapter 18 – The Law of Sacrifice

A Leader Must Give Up to Go Up

The true nature of leadership is sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a constant in leadership.

Contrary to popular belief – As you rise in leadership, responsibilities increase and rights decrease.

When you become a leader, you lose the right to think about yourself.

Leadership success requires continual change, improvement and sacrifice.

#### Chapter 19 – The Law of Timing

When to Lead Is As Important As What to Do and Where to Go

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

1. The wrong action at the wrong time leads to disaster.
2. The right action at the wrong time leads to resistance.
3. The wrong action at the right time is a mistake.
4. The right action at the right time results in success.

When the right time and the right leader come together, incredible things happen.

#### Chapter 20 – The Law of Explosive Growth

To Add Growth, Lead Followers – To Multiply, Lead Leaders

It's your job to build the leaders who will take the Navy through the next century.

**Leader's Math:** Leaders who develop followers develop them one at a time; leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth because they add all of that leaders followers also. It's like growing the Navy by teams rather than by individuals.

Becoming a leader who develops leaders requires an entirely different focus and attitude from those of a developer of followers. Consider some of the differences:

*Addition*  
LEADERS WHO  
DEVELOP FOLLOWERS

Need to be needed  
Focus on weaknesses  
Develop the bottom 20%  
Treat their people the same for  
fairness  
Hoard power  
Spend time with others  
Grow by addition  
Impact only people  
they touch personally

*Multiplication*  
LEADERS WHO  
DEVELOP LEADERS

Want to be succeeded  
Focus on strengths  
Develop the top 20%  
Treat their leaders as individuals for  
impact  
Give power away  
Invest time in others  
Grow by multiplication  
Impact people far beyond  
their own reach

### Chapter 21 – The Law of Legacy

#### A Leader's Lasting Value Is Measured by Succession

Make your organization stronger by preparing your successor (i.e., train your relief).

Leadership is not something you can delegate. You either exercise leadership or abdicate it. Or you can pass it on to your successor.

Leave a legacy by:

1. Lead the organization with a “long view”
2. Create a leadership culture
3. Pay the price today to assure success tomorrow
4. Value team leadership above individual leadership
5. Walk away from the organization with integrity

Every leader eventually leaves the organization. Part of your job is to prepare your people and organization for what is ahead. Develop leaders.

You will be judged by how well your people and your organization do after you are gone.

### CONCLUSION

As you work to build your organization, remember this:

- Personnel determine the potential of the organization
- Relationships determine the morale of the organization
- Structure determines the size of the organization
- Vision determines the direction of the organization
- Leadership determines the success of the organization