



## Becoming Your Best

### The 12 Principles of Highly Successful Leaders

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Running a business or department in today's high-pressure business landscape gets more difficult every year. Given the level of competition as well as market ups and downs, it seems that you either sacrifice your personal life for your job, or you lose everything. Steve Shallenberger has an important message for you: It doesn't have to be this way.

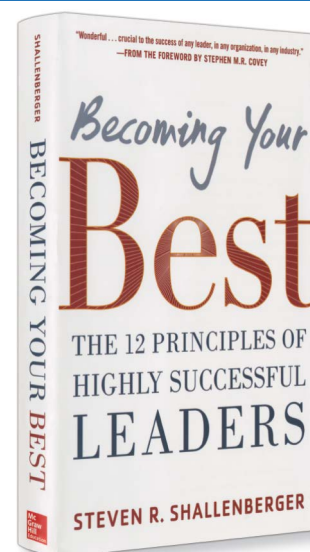
*Becoming Your Best* reveals the 12 principles you need to follow in order to reach your highest potential and drive the kind of innovation that turns good companies into industry leaders — all while living a well-balanced personal life.

Divided into three thematic sections — Transformational Leadership, Transformational Teams and Relationships, and Transformational Living — *Becoming Your Best* is packed with advice, tools and examples for turning your thoughts into action, motivating yourself and your people, inspiring teams to solve problems creatively, and building the life you've always dreamed of. You'll begin to see everything through a completely new lens — one that reveals change as something to embrace, not fear.

*Becoming Your Best* will arm you with the knowledge and tools to measurably improve your life as well as the lives of your employees and loved ones.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to avoid communication roadblocks.
- Four tips to living the Golden Rule.
- How to set goals and develop a plan to achieve them.
- How to control what you can control.



by Steven R. Shallenberger

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: BECOMING YOUR BEST

by Steven R. Shallenberger

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## PART I: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

### Be True to Character

One of the greatest assets a person or an organization can have is strength of character based on universal principles. However, a strong character is not easily acquired. It is forged over time as we are tested and our values and judgment skills are refined and tempered. People who have a strong character withstand tests and temptations by holding true to time-honored principles that have been identified as being good and honorable throughout the course of human history.

These bedrock principles include integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, perseverance, humility, compassion and respect for others. When your character reflects these principles, you earn the respect and trust of those around you. When you are true to your highest character, your actions reflect your beliefs and guide you through life, helping you to be your best.

### Be Strong in the Moment of Choice

Strength of character is demonstrated not just when things are going well, but especially when things get tough.

It is best to be strong in the initial moment of choice, but if you blow it, you will often have an opportunity to make a correction. We all have moments of weakness and poor judgment, but the ability to self-correct is critical if we want to build a strong character and a life of fulfillment and meaning.

As your integrity, honesty and respect for others are tested, tried and refined, the moral fabric that makes up

your character grows stronger. Over time, you become someone who can be counted on. This character establishes a moral authority within you that gives you great power and credibility.

### Stand Up and Speak Out

Another measure of a strong character is a willingness to speak up and take a stand that you believe in, even when it is not the popular choice. Such a display of strong character is the basis of many of our most popular tales of heroism, but we can also find examples of it in our daily lives.

Have the courage to be true to character. Exercise integrity, honesty, respect and correct principles. Whether you are the leader of a country, an organization, or a team or simply in your daily life, be determined that you will not sit idly on the sidelines of life when issues of character come up. The strength of your character will be evident in how you conduct yourself with all people.

### Guard Your Character

Being true to yourself is a hallmark of great character. In theory, this is easy to do, but it is tougher given the reality of the temptations and peer pressures encountered in daily life. In good times, it's easy to say that you will be true to your principles and values and remain strong, but your true character is formed and displayed in challenging times. ●

### Lead with a Vision

In nearly all individuals, classrooms, teams, divisions or organizations where we see sustained excellence, there is an inspiring and well-articulated vision.



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Regardless of whether they call it a dream, a mission statement or a cause, most highly successful leaders have a vision that helps to inspire and drive them.

A vision aims for a high level of achievement. It is not the same as goals or objectives, which are created after your vision is formed. A vision is a high-level desired outcome or accomplishment that you hope to achieve. A vision is how you describe yourself, your team or your organization from the 35,000-foot view.

### Attributes of a Transformational Vision

A vision can be transformational. When you have a clear, compelling vision, you transform the effort, the conversation and the results of not only your life but the life of your organization — whether that organization is a company, a community, a team or a family.

A vision sets a positive and meaningful direction with a purpose and a cause. It rallies support that results in commitments and new levels of contribution. A vision is developed through individual and shared leadership. Each participant in the vision is a “leader” who contributes uniqueness to the whole.

The value of the vision is what it communicates to you and to others. If it is clear and describes the desired direction of leadership, then it ensures that you’re headed in the right direction. ●

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## Manage with a Plan

The secret to getting things done in any area of your life is to use your imagination to create a vision, then develop goals as part of a long-range plan that supports the vision. Finally, of course, you have to summon the energy and determination to carry out that plan.

### Set Annual Goals, and Develop a Plan to Achieve Them

A very effective way to set individual goals is called Roles and Goals. You can use Roles and Goals to set clear and actionable goals and then develop a plan to make those goals a reality. Here are the ABCs for using Roles and Goals.

**1. Review your vision and the key roles in your life.** Begin by aligning your goals with your vision. Next, divide your life into key roles. These roles might include parent, friend, manager, employee, professional, student, citizen or church member. You also have the “personal” role — maintaining your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. When you divide your life into your var-

ious roles, it helps prevent misalignment of priorities and helps you focus your time on what matters most.

**2. Develop annual goals in each role using the SMART method.** SMART refers to setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-specific. Set SMART goals within each role.

**3. Share your goals.** Send your goals to a few friends, mentors, advisors or others who you admire and respect and who can give feedback that is worth following. This makes your goals official and makes you accountable.

**4. Develop a plan and set milestones.** The next step is to develop a plan with milestones to accomplish your goals. Determine what you’ll do in each step, with markers or milestones along the way. Breaking down a goal into actionable milestones makes it doable.

**5. Post your goals in a prominent place.** Put your written goals and plan in a place where you can see them often. Review your annual goals or major goals regularly so that they remain fresh in your mind. It’s helpful to review them each week prior to doing your planning for that week.

### Plan for the Unexpected

It’s great to have a written and well-thought-out plan. Then again, how often do things actually go as planned?

Contingency plans are essential to your survival, yet they’ll be much more effective if you think about your response before the crisis hits. Every leader needs to be prepared for health issues, changes in government regulations, product failure, lawsuits, a shift in the economy and the loss of key people.

When you think about your contingency plans, one place to start is to consider what your first three responses would be to a crisis situation in your personal life or your organization.

Looking at contingency plans for your business, you should consider how you would respond to situations that could have a dramatic impact on your bottom line.

### Manage for Results

Even with great plans, it still takes an effective leader to manage the plan and ensure that it is executed effectively. No leader succeeds without building a strong team of individuals who share the same vision and goals.

Effective management means that you inspire and empower your team members to stand with you and help you succeed.

Once you’ve attracted good people and instilled the vision into them, you have to give them the freedom to respond to dramatic changes in the external environment.

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Decisive action may be essential during chaotic situations. There is rarely time to sit back and brainstorm, so your team has to have the confidence and the freedom to do what needs to be done in a crisis situation.

As a leader, you are responsible for the success of the plan. Highly successful leaders are continually looking for ways to manage and lead their teams more effectively. It's about never being satisfied with where you currently are but always looking for ways to improve as a leader and as an individual. That's the spirit of becoming your best. ●

### Prioritize Your Time

Doing what matters most frequently requires discipline and maybe even sacrifices in your personal and professional life. This principle is about time and how to do and become our best with the time we have in life.

#### Get Your Priorities Straight, and Think High Quality and High Quantity

The first action is doing what matters most so that you are focused on both high quality and high quantity (HQ/HQ), in the *high-performance zone*. If you're not in the high-performance zone, sit down with a partner or a team and evaluate your plan. How do you need to adjust your plan to focus on what matters most? Maybe it means adjusting the development and production plan to launch a pilot rather than mass producing a product on the initial run.

#### Take Control of Your Life Through Pre-week Planning

Your efficiency, flexibility and stress management will significantly improve if you engage in careful and thoughtful preparation for what you'll do in the upcoming week. Pre-week planning is simple enough. You take 15 to 20 minutes on Saturday or Sunday and develop a detailed plan for the upcoming week.

Five steps in pre-week planning will help you focus on what matters most each week:

**Step 1.** Review your vision and your annual goals.

**Step 2.** Look ahead one to three months, or even further out, in your master calendar.

**Step 3.** Enter into your calendar all of the meetings and other scheduled events that you have planned for that week.

**Step 4.** Identify what matters most that week in each role.

**Step 5.** Determine a time during the week when you'll do each item you listed under each of the roles.

Pre-week planning is a powerful way to reduce stress, give you better quality time in each area of your life, and certainly increase your balance. It also prevents important things from slipping through the cracks.

#### Protect and Conserve Your Time

To stay focused on what matters most, you need to create internal guidelines so that you don't get trapped by all the distractions. To protect your time,

- Handle each task when it arises, and don't procrastinate.
- Manage your email and other electronic media effectively.
- Try to eliminate or minimize ineffective meetings.
- Avoid negative, draining interactions with others.

You can't really change or control others, so don't allow them to throw you off. Draw upon your strong inner core for your own peace, happiness and direction. Your positive and peaceful energy and your effective use of time are two of your most precious resources. Be a master at conserving them carefully. ●

## PART II: TRANSFORMATIONAL TEAMS AND RELATIONSHIPS

### Live the Golden Rule in Business and in Life

The spirit of the Golden Rule, simply put, is to "treat others as you would like to be treated." The rule transcends time and culture and can be a game changer when it comes to your long-term success and relationships.

Four very significant ways that you and I can apply this ageless rule in our modern world are, use the power of kindness, be caring and give service to others, put others first — and take them all the way home, and practice four powerful tips to live the Golden Rule.

**Tip 1:** Carry a shield of love. Make an effort to love someone, even when that person has been mean or rude to you. It's counterintuitive. However, just watch the peace, power and control that come into your total being as you take the high ground and respond with kindness guided by this force field of love.

**Tip 2:** Empathize with others. The Golden Rule is a reminder that you should be as attuned to the people around you as you are to yourself.

**Tip 3:** Be compassionate with others. When you feel critical of another person, consider saying to yourself, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Then offer compassion instead of judgment.

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**Tip 4:** Celebrate differences and avoid prejudice in every form. Prejudices can easily become ingrained in our perceptions of others. Make it a habit to celebrate the differences of others.

As the great poet and writer Maya Angelou noted, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” ●

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## Build and Maintain Trust

Trust is something that the highly successful leader constructs over time and then nurtures over the course of any relationship, whether it is with a family member, a coworker, an employer or the community. Strong and deep relationships are built upon trust and trustworthiness. When you betray a trust, it shows a weakness in your character, and that leads to fewer opportunities and diminished chances for success.

When you do things that increase the level of trust, your capacity to build relationships, create and seize opportunities, and achieve success increases substantially. When trust is high, you become more effective and influential in all aspects of your life. Even the most complex interactions and transactions become significantly easier when there is a high level of trust.

### Build and Maintain Trust Through Your Actions

You certainly want to trust others, and you want others to feel that they can trust you. Here are a few specific actions you can take to make yourself worthy of trust:

- Do high-quality work, and finish it on schedule.
- Be consistent so that others will see you as reliable.
- Be predictable.
- Be open in communicating commitments, and be willing to have your performance measured.
- Give trust.
- Tell the truth.

As you achieve trustworthiness and meet the expectations of others, you will experience peace and balance in your life. Your relationships will be more rewarding, you will be better able to resist negative influences and you will build self-respect.

Another specific action you can take to build and maintain trust includes conscientiously working to establish trust at all levels of your organization. Trust doesn’t simply flow from the top down. It’s vital that you have a culture

in which employees are willing to share their feelings, to express concerns and to offer solutions. For that to happen, highly successful leaders create a culture of listening and understanding the ideas and feedback from others, no matter how unpleasant the circumstances may be.

### Learn the Stories of Those Around You

The first step in creating bonds of trust is to build a rapport based on shared experiences and mutual understanding. It’s difficult to work with someone you don’t trust, and it’s even harder to trust someone you don’t know. The challenge in this fast-paced and hectic world is to learn the stories of those around you in order to build bonds of trust with them. Highly successful leaders always find a way to build relationships.

To build trust with someone, try these game-changing words: *What is your story?* No matter what your profession may be, if you take the time to get to know the people around you, it will establish a higher level of trust and foster opportunities for more business.

As you work to become your best in your relationships and your career, trust is a critical component. ●

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## Be an Effective Communicator

Better communication begins not with speaking or expressing yourself but with *listening* to others instead. How you listen to others says a great deal about your character. So, to become a better listener — a sincere, interested, positive listener — you must begin with what’s inside of you.

### Be a Highly Effective Communicator

Here are some of the keys to becoming a highly effective communicator:

- Look the person in the eyes.
- When someone is speaking to you, don’t worry about what you’re going to say next.
- Pay attention to body language.
- Repeat back and check for understanding.

### Avoid Communication Roadblocks

You should also be aware of certain obstacles to clear communication in the workplace and in your relationships. Some of these are related to tone, attitudes and simple communication habits. Others may be the result of character flaws, prejudices or insensitivities that need to be addressed if you hope to become your best and be a successful leader.

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Here are a few “roadblocks” that may be hindering your effectiveness as a communicator and leader:

**Ordering, directing and commanding.** Example: “You will do as you are ordered without question.” Keep in mind that in most cases, leaders cannot be effective if they demand respect; they have to earn it and share it.

**Warning, admonishing and threatening.** Example: If you miss that quota one more quarter, I’ll find someone who can do the job.” Most people do not respond well to threats or pressure.

**Moralizing, preaching and imploring.** Example: “You, of all people, should have known better. I’m disappointed in you.” Moral superiority is a tough mantle to wear well. No one likes to be treated like an inferior being.

**Advising or giving suggestions or solutions.** Example: “If it were me, I’d do it this way.” This can be highly appropriate if you are training Eagle Scouts, but that may not be the best way to communicate with your department heads, your spouse or the IT wizards you brought in to revamp your company software.

### Master the Art of Feedback

Feedback is free consulting! When we ask for and give feedback in the right way, it can make a tremendous difference in an organization or a relationship.

There is a very practical method for gathering feedback in the form of ideas, suggestions and concerns, without creating conflict. It involves a three-step process called Continue-Start-Stop. Write the three words on a sheet of paper. Below the word “Continue,” write your ideas or suggestions for things that work well and that you would like the person or organization to continue doing. Below the word “Start,” write your ideas and suggestions for things you would like the person or organization to start doing that aren’t currently being done. Below the word “Stop,” write your suggestions for things that the person or organization should stop doing because, in your view, they are not working well.

You can use this three-step method to provide feedback to others or to solicit feedback from others for yourself or your organization. Although it takes some courage to invite others to provide feedback like this, if the feedback is sincere, specific and constructive, it can be invaluable for improving communication and helping relationships get to a better place.

### Learn to Control Your Emotions

A final area that many people find challenging is controlling their emotions, particularly their anger, when communicating in stressful situations.

Wrath, which can be defined as anger, impatience, being opinionated or prejudiced, or even expressing rage, is a major barrier to effective communication. Communicating when you are wrathful usually alienates those who you are trying to influence or reach. Rarely does anything good come out of it. More often, it results in bitterness, retaliation and rejection.

Stepping back and giving yourself time to regain control of your emotions is a proven method for improving your communication skills. The minute you revert back to listening, you get to a better place. The next time you feel hot blood rising with emotion, say to yourself, “Don’t react. Listen and understand.” ●

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## Innovate Through Imagination

From research into what makes individuals, companies and organizations successful, we identified common success factors in the long-term highest achievers, and one of them was the ability to tap the power of imagination to innovate and remain relevant over many years and decades.

The human imagination is capable of producing endless opportunities and possibilities. With them comes *hope* and the belief that there are solutions to problems.

First comes the idea, the inspiration or the vision, and then comes the process for making your dream a reality. Imagination also allows us to sketch out the pathway to that reality. It creates the magic in our lives, our businesses and our organizations.

Here are four ways to fire up your imagination:

**Be curious and ask the right questions.** Highly successful people fire up their imaginations with an insatiable desire to understand how things work. Their curiosity is boundless. Their lives and accomplishments are built upon creativity and drive as well as powerful intellects.

**Create a brainstorm of possibilities.** Having different perspectives is critical to innovation. That’s what brainstorming involves: tapping the mental energies of a group in order to trigger every participant’s imagination. When you enlist the help of others, the number of new and fresh ideas goes up exponentially.

**Walk away and let your subconscious do the work.** Incubation is defined as a time when a problem is “parked” in your subconscious. You can’t see any progress being made, but your mind is quietly whirling away. Sometimes the subconscious can unlock amazing ideas when we least expect them, so we should be open and ready for them.

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**Write about your ideas.** Often the simple act of putting pen to paper will allow your thoughts to flow. Writing can help you clarify and organize ideas that might otherwise slip away. ●

## PART III: TRANSFORMATIONAL LIVING

### Be Accountable

We all fall short of expectations and make mistakes occasionally. When there is a misunderstanding, confusion, a missed meeting, something that is not going right or a mistake, simply fess up — take responsibility — and move on. When it's all over, take stock of what went right and what went wrong. Evaluate what you could have done better, jot down your thoughts, and then put the problem behind you.

People who aren't accountable tend to blame others or deny that they were responsible. You may be tempted to offer one of the classic copouts: "I didn't know," "I wasn't there," "I didn't have time" or "It's not my job." But using those excuses creates more anxiety and doesn't take you toward personal or institutional success.

Embedded in the commitment to be accountable is a commitment to do what you need to do to take control of your life and to become your best.

#### Accountability Strategies

I want to share with you strategies and tools that can help you understand how to live with accountability as an individual and as a leader.

1. **Control what you can control.** Focusing your energy on what you can control empowers you to move away from criticism, complaints and condemnations and forge ahead to become your best and achieve the highest levels of success. By controlling your response to challenges, frustrations and aggravations, you can greatly enhance the quality of your life.

2. **Develop relationship agreements.** These documents clearly define the vision, the reward system, the expectations and the accountability in any relationship, personal or professional. What's important is that you focus on your sphere of influence, and that will carry over to others.

3. **Eliminate procrastination and follow through.** There are specific actions that you can take to improve your accountability: eliminate procrastination and follow through. Do what you say you will do, and do it in a timely manner. If there is a problem or a good reason to withdraw your commitment, make sure you communicate

with the people involved so that they can make adjustments if necessary. ●

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### Apply the Power of Knowledge

Your actions and your behavior follow your thoughts. If you thoughtfully engineer *what* goes into your mind and your heart, these factors of change will have an enormous impact on your ability to achieve your dreams and realize the best you can be.

If we really want to learn to apply the power of knowledge, it's important that we approach learning with these characteristics: a hunger to learn, humility and a willingness to try new things.

I have several game-changing invitations that could have a dramatic impact on your personal and professional life:

- Develop the habit of reading at least one book a month.
- Invest 3 percent of your income in acquiring more knowledge through seminars, training, books and personal development courses.
- Surround yourself with people who inspire and lift you.

The second part of this principle is to regularly assess the external environment. These are things that are outside of your control. They include natural disasters, disease, the death of a loved one, an accident, the economy, government regulations, your spouse or partner, children, people you work with, setbacks with your company, competition, changing markets and bad weather. Make an assessment by getting out a sheet of paper and drawing a large circle. You are on the inside, and the external environment is on the outside. Now, write down all of the external forces on the outside that could possibly have an impact on your life.

Once you finish thinking about the various factors, circle or highlight the two or three threats or opportunities that can have the biggest impact on your life. Then develop an action plan for taking advantage of opportunities or avoiding the threats to you and your organization.

This is a powerful way to gain knowledge, which then allows you to effectively apply it. ●

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### Live in Peace and Balance

Four harmonizing principles of peace and balance can help you clear your mind during even the most chaotic times at work or at home. They can be especially helpful to leaders who are striving for the highest levels of success.

- Increase balance in your life.
- Increase your peace through meditation.

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- Laugh often.
- See yourself in a positive light through self-affirmation and positive self-talk.

Finding peace and balance requires inner strength. The more self-reliant and balanced you are in the different areas of your life, the greater your capacity to work effectively while making a difference.

Let's try a simple assessment called the Circle of Peace and Balance, which divides our lives into six areas that need our attention and consistent care. When each of these six areas is properly cared for, it's like balancing the wheels on your car to keep it running smoothly.

1. Your physical and emotional health.
2. Your mental health and your intellect.
3. The financial aspects of your life.
4. Security and safety.
5. Social life and relationships.
6. Your spiritual life.

With all these elements in place, the Circle of Peace and Balance resembles a wheel with six spokes. Each spoke of the wheel represents one of the six areas that are critical to maintaining balance in your life. Write a scale of 1 to 10 coming out from the hub in each of the six areas, and rate yourself by circling a number in each. Then connect the numbers that you circled. If you have a nice balanced circle, congratulations! However, most people rate themselves high in some areas and not so high in other areas.

The Circle of Peace and Balance is a simple way to assess whether your life is in balance, but make no mistake, it can be a lifesaver if you use it to identify areas that may need additional attention. Once you identify those areas, you can go to work and make the necessary adjustments.

You are the master of your fate. Finding peace and balance during the journey, both personally and in your organization, leads to greater health and happiness and an increased capacity to sustain excellence and fulfillment. ●

### Never Give Up!

If you choose to never give up, you have a much better chance to succeed. You may still have to make corrections in your course, but as long as you refuse to give up, your goals will be within reach.

Virtually everyone will experience a failure or setback at some point. According to our research, high achievers typically experience at least three to four major failures and seven major successes in their careers. We can learn great lessons from our own failures and from the failures of others.

There are three steps to bolster your determination and inspire you to keep striving to achieve your dreams and goals, no matter what opposition, challenges or failures you experience:

**1. Defeat the enemy within through hard work and action.** If you learn self-control to such an extent that you can adjust your attitude on the run, you will never be defeated by self-doubt, which is the enemy within.

**2. See the value of failure.** Your failures do not define your life unless you allow that to happen. When a challenge arises, be aware of the words that instinctively come to mind. The thoughts we entertain define our mindset toward failure. If negative, self-accusing, angry thoughts are instinctive to you, then your mindset will be to see failure as worthless. If you choose to entertain positive, self-motivating and inspiring thoughts, then you're more likely to see failure in a positive light.

**3. Hold to a purpose that inspires you.** We don't ask for adversity or challenges. They often come when we least expect them. Think now about finding a purpose if you should experience a great tragedy. Think about what drives you, and tap into it before challenges arise. Use whatever inspires you as a life vest when storms hit. Cling to your most inspiring visions as sources of strength and determination. The moment you think about giving up, recall what has brought you this far, and resolve to continue on toward your dreams and goals.

Finally, remember that *never give up* is a guiding constant for successful people, relationships and organizations. It makes all the difference between those who falter and those who finish. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Becoming Your Best*, you'll also like:

1. ***360 Degrees of Influence*** by Harrison Monarth. Monarth provides advice on how to gain the trust and respect of those around you and how to expand your influence well beyond your immediate environment.
2. ***Just Listen*** by Mark Goulston. A veteran psychiatrist and business coach, Goulston reveals the secret of how to get through to anyone, even when productive communication seems impossible.
3. ***The 360 Leader*** by John C. Maxwell. According to Maxwell, you can learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization by becoming a 360-degree leader.