

# Building the Best

8 Proven Leadership Principles to Elevate Others to Success

by **John Eades**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Organizational culture has undergone a seismic shift in the 21st century—and with it, the requirements of leadership. In *Building the Best*, LearnLoft CEO John Eades takes you on a journey of transformation that will equip you with the tools you need to become the kind of cutting-edge leader today's workplace so urgently needs.

Beginning with the benefits of great leadership—and the drawbacks of bad leadership—Eades describes how leaders elevate others and how their practices pay huge dividends. At the core of such leadership is a carefully balanced blend of “love and discipline”—a guiding principle that helps create high levels of performance by leaning on standards while at the same time caring about the long-term success and well-being of each team member.

Leadership is a journey, not a destination. *Building the Best* offers a powerful blueprint for embarking on that journey—the first step in taking your team or organization toward true greatness.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why elevating others requires practicing love and discipline.
- The four elements of team culture and how to develop them.
- The purpose trifecta of values, vision, and mission.
- To maintain high standards and practice true accountability.

## Part I: Change Your Heart

### Point to the Benefits

The impact that a great leader has on the world is powerful enough to set aside the most irreconcilable differences. After President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, more than 7 million citizens paid their respects as Lincoln's body was transported from Washington, DC, to Springfield, Illinois.

The political turmoil dissipated as individuals from all walks of life rallied in droves to pay their respects. A good friend and confidant of Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, famously wept at one of his memorial services as he said, "Lincoln was the greatest man I had ever known." The heart of the United States was wholly broken.

If great leadership can be powerful enough to set aside irreconcilable differences, what is the impact of being a bad leader?

There are two main costs of being a bad leader: financial and health. Research at LearnLoft estimates that one bad leader costs a company between \$100,000 and \$115,000 over the course of a year due to higher-than-average turnover, low employee engagement, and an overall lack of productivity.

The health costs are even more interesting. In 2011, the American Institute of Stress conducted a study on managers and executives, finding that they are 52 percent more likely to die earlier than their counterparts due to stress-related issues. It makes a convincing case that the worse a leader is, the higher the leader's stress is going to be, increasing the likelihood of early death.

A recent Gallup study showed that 75 percent of employees leave their jobs because of their bosses and not the position itself. The majority of top performers gladly exit a toxic environment instead of tolerating lousy leadership. This often leaves average or below-average employees reporting to bad leaders. For fear of losing their job, these employees are forced to deal as best they can.

A real cyclical effect emerges, and it takes a major shake-up in an organization to change the negative agents at work.

Your responsibility as a leader is bigger and broader than you think. Think about the impact Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and John F. Kennedy had and still have on the world. It's a humbling thought that as a leader, good or bad, you will impact the world for decades after you are gone.

Regardless of the leadership you've experienced, the leader that you are and the impact that you will have is a choice that lies within you.

### It All Starts With a Model

Commit this definition of leadership to memory: *Leadership is inspiring, empowering, and serving in order to elevate others over an extended period of time.*

All three words (inspiring, empowering, and serving) are paramount to building the best and elevating others. If what you are doing to proactively elevate others results in them being more inspired, empowers them to make decisions, and serves their heart, then you are on your way to true leadership.

While having an incredible leader at the helm is critical, in order to grow and evolve as a business or team, you must have an army of leaders behind you that also build the best and elevate others. What they need is a simple idea or way to think about how to do it. Let's talk about that next.

### Practice Love and Discipline

#### Principle 1: Use high levels of love and discipline to elevate others.

How can the terms "love" and "discipline" translate into a corporate environment? They aren't exactly words encouraged by Human Resources. "Love" and "discipline" are words that can be ambiguous, so consider these definitions that apply to the workplace.

**Love** (verb): to contribute to someone's long-term success and well-being.

**Discipline** (verb): to promote standards in order for an individual to choose to be at his or her best.

A LearnLoft study of 40,000 leaders in various roles ranging from CEOs to frontline managers revealed a direct correlation between leaders' effectiveness and their use of love and discipline. Highly effective leaders were those who leveraged high levels of both love and discipline; those leaders who ranked low in effectiveness rated low in their use of love and discipline.

Leaders whose style is to elevate leverage love and discipline through 16 key demonstrable competencies, eight in love and eight in discipline. These 16 core competencies are a fantastic barometer to determine specific strengths and weaknesses in the way you lead.

As a leader, you must consistently share your competence and care in order for people to trust you.

### Love Competencies

**Recognition:** How often and effectively you take advantage of opportunities to make your team members feel valued and appreciated.

**Personability:** How engaging you are with individuals on your team, both in your mannerisms and demeanor.

**Development:** How much emphasis you put on the development of your team to ensure their long-term success and well-being.

**Unity:** How well you create a sense of belonging and connections between your team members.

**Positivity:** How optimistic you are when speaking to or being around your team.

**Vulnerability:** The level at which you share the truth about mistakes, personal feelings, or lack of knowledge.

**Empathy:** How well you are able to identify with your team to understand their feelings and perspectives, in order to guide your actions.

**Trust:** How confident your team is that you will do what's right.

### Discipline Competencies

**Standards:** How clearly you define, communicate, and promote what good looks like.

**Coach:** How effective you are at providing guidance and training to improve the skills of your team.

**Goals:** How clearly you've defined, communicated, and measured goals.

**Model:** How well you exemplify the standards and behaviors you expect from your team.

**Consistency:** The stability, predictability, and emotional intelligence of your behaviors.

**Accountability:** How effectively and consistently you hold your team accountable to the standards you've set.

**Priority:** How clearly you determine the order in which your team should complete work based on relative importance.

**Vision:** How well you define, communicate, and reinforce what you want your team or business to be in the future.

Simultaneously leading with high levels of love and discipline isn't easy. But if you don't use love, you won't connect with people to get their best possible performance. If you don't use discipline, you aren't going to get anyone to levels they didn't think possible. The natural question becomes, where do you start, and how do you do it?

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## Part II: Start With the Fundamentals

### Build Real Bonds

**Principle 2: Without strong relationships, you can't lead.**

The ability to lead a team starts with good, quality, professional relationships, built on the bond of mutual trust. As a leader, you must consistently share your competence and care in order for people to trust you. The key word here is consistency. Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn and partner at Greylock, came up with a good formula for easily understanding trust:

Consistency + Time = Trust

The Trust Compound Theory says that each day, you get the opportunity to build stronger bonds of mutual trust with your team by sharing your competence, showing you care, and exposing your character. Each member of your team is evaluating how much they trust you based on how well you do these three things.

**Competence.** Competence hinges on the depth of your knowledge and how willing you are to impart that to others. The key to sharing your own competence is imparting the technical knowledge you have gained to those you lead as well as your leadership skills on an ongoing basis. Your willingness to share these two things is your ticket to building bonds that lead to big things.

**Care.** In order for your team to understand how much you care about them, you must reject the notion that words hold great power. Instead, accept the power of actions. In order to show your people you care, you have to get to know them on a professional and personal level. This starts with asking them questions about their own journey, experiences, challenges, and what drives them. Instead of just going through the motions, you have to be intent on listening and remembering so you can adjust your actions in the future to show them you listened.

Like all great relationships, the only way to get there is by dedicating time. Your time is valuable, and you can't get it back. Devoting time to someone else shows that you care, and they are more important than anything else you have going on. Another powerful way to show you care is to be vulnerable; share truths and ask for help when you need it.

**Character.** Character is defined as the mental and moral qualities distinctive to you as an individual. It's an engraved set of disciplined habits and a settled disposition to do good. When there is clearly a right or wrong, the choice you make is based on your character. In the workplace, a person's character is put to the test frequently.

The simplest examples in which your team will evaluate your character include things like

- How do you treat others who have nothing to give you in return?
- How do you act in groups?
- Do you interrupt others when they are talking?
- What do you value most out of life?

### Encourage the Culture

#### **Principle 3: Culture starts with you, but your people prove it.**

Culture in the modern business sense is the shared beliefs and values that guide thinking and behavior. Four elements make up any team's culture:

**Safety.** Before people can perform at their best, they first need to feel safe and protected. How does the current environment make your people feel? First, are the working conditions physically safe? Second, do team members feel emotionally safe to share ideas and feelings without fear of any repercussions?

Creating a physically safe environment is cut and dried.

What isn't so cut and dried is creating an emotionally safe environment so people on a team are able to set aside their self-doubt, uncertainty, and fear so they can perform at their best. The only way for you to encourage a psychologically safe environment is by understanding that it starts with you. You have to be intentional about creating an inviting work space where people can share ideas, ask questions, and collaborate. If your team perceives their comments are going to be judged or not respected, they will begin to reserve those ideas and questions for a different environment altogether.

**Unity.** Inclusivity and people feeling like they are part of something bigger than themselves help feed productivity and innovation. Does each person on your team feel like he or she plays an integral part? Does everyone work together as a team, or do they create silos or cliques? At the center of unity is mutual respect among team members and a feeling of belonging. It is a major responsibility as a leader to give your people this sense of belonging in order to create a unified team.

**Positivity.** Beliefs drive people's actions, and actions drive results. If your team's beliefs are optimistic, the chances of good things happening in the future are drastically higher than the alternative. Positivity is driven from the top down, and it's contagious. If you want to have a culture that is encouraging for others, it is your responsibility to make a conscious effort to be positive.

For positivity to take root in your culture, it has to reach every individual on your team: When bad things happen, respond with a positive comment. Promote and encourage things that help create positive energy. Finally, remove the people that cause negativity.

**Energy.** Energy keeps your team going and impacts the intensity and speed at which people perform. High energy yields high performance. Traditional thinking says energy comes from results. While this isn't wrong, energy can be produced, well before results are achieved, through the power of words or mantras. Examples of mantras include "Let's Go," "Take Dead Aim," and "Move the Needle."

Part of your job as a leader is to ensure you have a Maximizing Mantra for your team, company, or even your family so you can create a similar sense of energy for others. It's important that your Maximizing Mantra is simple, provides clarity, is action-oriented, and most importantly, is fun. Use it all the time, and keep it in the forefront of your people's eyes and hearts.

## Clarify the Purpose

### Principle 4: People persevere because of purpose, not pay.

With so many options for people to choose from when it comes to where they work or what team they join, those leaders who are intensely connected to their purpose stand out from the crowd. It also fuels a team to continue to pursue their purpose when times are difficult or challenging.

Three cornerstones are necessary to clarify a purpose. The purpose trifecta is made up of values, vision, and mission. Clarifying these three parts will dramatically increase your odds of building the best team and organization.

**Values.** Core values are the fundamental beliefs a person or team holds true. Once established, these guiding beliefs dictate behavior and help individuals decipher right from wrong.

A common denominator of all leaders who build the best is the time they dedicate to defining a set of core values. But they don't stop at defining the values. Instead, they make those values part of the team's guiding light.

Values come alive not through words on a wall or a website but through the actions of everyone in the organization. Talented people are not attracted to empty words but, rather, the exercising of them. Rewarding, recognizing, and talking about them on an ongoing basis provides a clear expression of how important they are to you and your people.

If you don't know where to start, take this list of common core values and narrow it down to four or five that best align to the group you lead: hard work, work ethic, loyalty, honesty, consistency, serving, creativity, courage, perseverance, ownership, humor, open-mindedness, reliability, compassion, competitiveness, will, passion, empower. When you come up with a final list, design a phrase that brings it to life.

For example, Skookum Digital Design, a software development and design company based in Charlotte, North Carolina, defined four core values and later added one more: simplify and go; embrace change; own it; choose to be happy; and give more than you take.

**Vision.** The best leaders are visionaries. They have in view what is possible in the future.

Ask yourself these questions about the future: "What does it look like? What is happening on the team or in the company? How many people are joining you on the journey? What kinds of people? What is the celebration going to

look like? How are you going to feel? How is your team going to react? What is your family going to say? How will the world be different? How will the lives of the people you touch in the process be different?"

**Mission.** There is no exact formula to dictate how an organization or team should lay out its mission statement. Roderic Yapp, a former Royal Marines officer, shared a formula: *We do X in order to achieve Y for Z.*

Broken down, it is simply what you do, why you do it, and for whom it is done. The key is to define your mission in a way that everyone can identify why decisions are made and actions are taken. Here's the mission statement of Movement Mortgage: "We exist to love and value people by creating a Movement of Change in our Industry, Corporate Cultures, and Communities."

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## Part III: Balance People and Performance

### Execute Every Day

#### Principle 5: Goals aren't achieved without priorities put into action.

While your purpose trifecta of mission, vision, and values remains solid and steady over time, it must be put into action. In order to do that, it has to be broken down further into an actionable system everyone on your team can buy into and use as a grounding force as they take ownership of their daily decisions.

The GPI System involves goals, priorities, and initiatives. GPI puts the purpose trifecta into an actionable format that leaves nothing to question. It's the step-by-step directions your team will follow to get you from a short-

term goal to a long-term vision.

**Goals.** If you haven't already created a clear goal for your team, use this formula to come up with one:

Clear Objective + Completion Date + Carrot = Your Team Goal

The team will be far more likely to succeed if the goal is specific and each member gets behind it. The key after defining the goal and a completion date will be coming up with the "carrot" that helps motivate the team to achieve the goal.

**Priorities accelerating growth.** Regardless of your industry or the nature of the work your team does, you must have defined priorities if you want to hit your team goal. These are specific things that are regarded as more important than other things. If you have never defined priorities, consider specific areas within products, people, projects, or job functions. When evaluating your own priorities in these areas, ask yourself, "Will focusing on this help our team achieve our goal?"

**Initiatives to make impact.** Much like defining a goal, priorities by themselves don't do a whole lot. Your team must make decisions every day in alignment with those priorities in order for them to drive real results. That's why the GPI System goes one step deeper into initiatives.

Entrepreneur Mac Lackey came up with a simple method that focuses on daily tasks that will "move the needle" for his company. Each day he pulls out a three-by-five notecard and writes "WMN" on the top. Underneath he fills out his to-do list with initiatives that will help his company "move the needle." He aptly calls his method WMN, or "what moves the needle."

Instead of thinking of this as a big change, just consider the fact that you and probably everyone on your team either writes down their initiatives each day or keeps a mental checklist. WMN ensures you aren't just making a to-do list full of tasks to check off but, instead, working on things that will move the team or business forward.

### Align the Behaviors

**Principle 6: The instant you lower your standards is the instant performance erodes.**

You can and should leverage standards to align the behaviors of your team. When you do, you will be on your way to getting the results you want out of others.

Imagine for a minute your state decided to remove speed limit signs altogether. Drivers could drive as fast as they

wanted on any given road. Would you still drive 25 mph in a school zone, or would you go 35 mph and just keep an eye out for children? You would likely pick the latter. The principle here is this: The instant you lower the standard is the instant performance begins to erode.

High standards produce behaviors from people. Those behaviors, when practiced repeatedly, become a habit, and those habits lead to results. This pattern is called the Route to Results. Instead of focusing on results first, you must have the patience to follow the Route to Results. Start at the beginning by setting great standards, and the rest will follow.

Building the Best workshops use a specific structure for the creation of standards: Write down two standards that fall into the categories of policy, procedure, and merit. Keep it to a sentence or less to ensure a clear standard. For example, a policy standard is "Dress code: Dress appropriately for the day."

For each standard you set for your team, it's critical you are able to articulate why it exists by tying it to one of two thoughts our brains are always evaluating: gain or pain. The simplest way to think about "gain" is by answering the following question around each standard you have established: What good thing happens to each person individually or the team as a whole if they live out the standard?

The simplest way to determine the "pain" is by asking yourself a slightly different question: What bad thing happens to them or the team if they fail to live out the standard? Whether you lean toward connecting why a standard exists to gain or pain, the key is knowing the answer and being prepared to share it.

Once you're ready to have the conversation with your team, either one-on-one or in a group setting, there is a simple four-step conversation framework you can use to improve the likelihood you are successful:

- Step 1: I realize I have failed you from a leadership perspective (vulnerability);
- Step 2: Here's how I propose we solve it (standard);
- Step 3: If you live out this standard, here is what will happen (pain avoidance or gain);
- Step 4: Do I have your commitment moving forward? (buy-in).

### Have Direct Dialogues

**Principle 7: Accountability is an advantage; make it your obligation.**

## Simple acts of acknowledgment go a long way toward helping employees feel the opposite of . . . negative emotions.

Most people think of accountability in a negative way and believe because they are willing to fire someone that they are good at it. The truth is, accountability isn't only focusing on the negative; firing someone is one of the weakest forms of it. Accountability can be used to praise and recognize team members who meet and exceed the standards set by a leader.

In the Acts of Accountability Mode, you provide accountability by sharing disapproval when someone fails to meet the standards, acknowledging them when standards are met, and/or giving praise when standards are exceeded.

Once you are able to quickly identify the behaviors from someone on your team, here is how you engage in disapproval, acknowledgment, and praise by using Direct Dialogues. A meaningful Direct Dialogue requires the use of a three-part formula that has helped countless leaders have successful dialogues with their people:

Standards + Evidence + Courage = Direct Dialogue

If you have all three parts—standards, evidence, and courage—the interactions with your team members who fail, meet, or exceed the standard will happen naturally because you will be evaluating the standards set for your team, constantly observing evidence, and showing the courage to bring important things to their attention.

Setting standards has already been covered. The second element is evidence. You need to be prepared with facts and not feelings to support your disapproval, acknowledgment, or praise. The evidence should be specific, detailed, and tangible.

Once you have gathered the evidence of why a team member is failing, meeting, or exceeding standards, then you need the most significant element of the formula, courage. Courage is simply the ability to do something that frightens you.

The 6-Step Disapproval Dialogue is a straightforward set of steps that can be used to have more productive disapproval dialogues with your people in a short amount of time:

1. Set the stage.
2. Share evidence.

3. Allow response.
4. Talk impact.
5. Coach for growth.
6. Close with Actions.

To acknowledge when standards are met, leaders who elevate use these phrases: “Thank you!” “Well done!” “Good job!” “Looks good!” “I appreciate the work!” “Keep it up!” Although this seems simple, choosing to use these words with your team can be a powerful tool. A large number of employees feel undervalued, under-appreciated, and frustrated at work. Simple acts of acknowledgment go a long way toward helping employees feel the opposite of these negative emotions.

It is equally important to give authentic praise and recognition when people go above and beyond the standard. The 3x3 Praise Model shows how and where to give praise. First, how: Be definitive, discuss the impact of the behavior, and show appreciation. In terms of where to do it, give praise one-on-one, publicly, or indirectly.

### Develop the People

#### **Principle 8: Coaching unlocks potential and elevates performance.**

While a team can function autonomously, a strong, dedicated leader plays an integral role in pushing people to new heights of development. They do this by focusing on coaching their people for role development and going beyond the role.

There are four clear stages a person moves through in a position or role. Well-tuned leaders are able to identify where team members are currently in their development and align their coaching appropriately. This allows for a platform through which each team member can flourish and grow. The goal is steadfast: Help your people reach a stage of development that exceeds where they are today.

**Stage 1: Awareness.** Individuals are made aware, either by another person or through self-discovery, of the important

fundamental skills they need to develop in their current role. They then do a mental assessment of their current proficiency level in each of the fundamental skill areas. Once this is established, they evaluate the ways and/or resources available to help them make progress. The time spent in this stage can be anywhere from one day to six months.

**Stage 2: Building critical mass.** Individuals begin building critical mass in their role as they acquire knowledge and get the opportunity to advance their skills within the position. They advance quickest in this stage when they get both the opportunity to watch others apply the skills effectively and the opportunity to practice the skills while being watched by someone else. Eventually, confidence is built and individuals will start to apply the concepts learned by themselves. Their proficiency in all the skills involved in the role will often double time after time in this stage. Time spent in this stage ranges from three months to two years.

**Stage 3: Accelerated performance.** The role becomes easier for individuals to execute, and they are able to fully execute the job responsibilities on their own at a high level. Because of this, their confidence continues to increase and the ability to add on or modify skills contributes to the streamlining of related daily tasks. Errors are much less frequent. Often individuals are able to teach less-experienced team mates how to do the job by transferring the knowledge and experience they have gained.

As great as this is, many people stop developing their skills at this stage. There's a tendency for people at this stage to believe they've learned all they can and settle into a false sense of security. Time spent in this stage can last anywhere from 12 months to 10 years.

**Stage 4: Sustained excellence.** The role is mastered. There is no lack of knowledge, as individuals at this stage have a well-rounded understanding and ability to execute at the highest level. This doesn't mean they always perform all of the tasks required to do the job without error, but they sustain excellence by having the ability to self-correct when they make mistakes. Their sustained excellence can earn the individual the title of "industry expert." It often can take five or 10 years to enter this stage, and sometimes it's never achieved, regardless of time.

This world needs you to lead in a way that elevates others. If your actions can inspire, empower, and serve in order to elevate others over an extended period of time, then you can lead wherever you are.

When you do, the impact you make on others will go beyond your wildest imagination. It will be a force on this earth well after you are no longer here because the people you lead will remember and eventually elevate those they lead.

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John Eades is an author, podcast host, in-demand speaker, and the CEO of LearnLoft, a leadership development company providing premium content to help elevate the way professionals lead. He and his team at LearnLoft partner with growing companies to power their leadership and culture development initiatives. His blogs, podcasts, and videos have been viewed more than 7 million times, and he was awarded a Readership Award by TrainingIndustry.com.

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