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## Leadership Gold

### Lessons I've Learned from a Lifetime of Leading

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

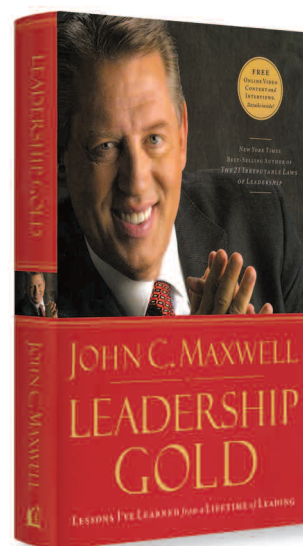
Good leadership always makes a difference. It can turn organizations around and positively impact the lives of thousands of individuals. Leadership is not easy to learn, but what worthwhile thing is? Being a better leader pays dividends, but it takes great effort. Leadership requires a lot from a person. It is both demanding and complex. By learning more about leadership you will make a difference in yourself, and you will make a difference in the lives of others.

A leader among leaders, Dr. John C. Maxwell promised himself early in his career that he wouldn't write this book until he was 60. And now it's finally here. Maxwell delivers the most valuable lessons he has discovered during 40 years of leading. The lessons he has spent an entire lifetime mining and now shares are personal and often simple, yet these gold nuggets can have a lasting impact on your leadership style and strategy.

*Leadership Gold* is for anyone who currently leads or aspires to lead. It offers the best of the best and the tried-and-true insights that no one but Maxwell can deliver. With his signature style, Maxwell comes alongside the reader like a mentor, candidly taking them through what feels like a series of one-on-one leadership lessons. If you are a seasoned successful leader, Maxwell's lessons will serve as reminders and they will help you as you guide potential leaders to also be successful and willing to make a difference.

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

- How the toughest person to lead is always yourself.
- Why you should not send your ducks to eagle school.
- How leaders distinguish themselves during tough times.
- Why the best leaders are good listeners.
- How the secret to a good meeting is the meeting before the meeting.
- How to create a legacy worth leaving.



by John C. Maxwell

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: LEADERSHIP GOLD

by John C. Maxwell

**The author:** John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker and author who has sold more than 13 million books. His organizations have trained more than two million leaders worldwide. Dr. Maxwell is the founder of EQUIP and INJOY Stewardship Services.

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## If It's Lonely at the Top, You're Not Doing Something Right

There are many people in the world who are willing to give advice on things they've never experienced. They are like bad travel agents: They sell you an expensive ticket and say, "I hope you enjoy the trip." Then you never see them again. In contrast, good leaders are like tour guides. They know the territory because they've made the trip before, and they do what they can to make the trip enjoyable and successful for everybody.

A leader's credibility begins with personal success. It ends with helping others achieve personal success. To gain credibility, you must consistently demonstrate three things:

1. **Initiative.** You have to *get up* to go up.
2. **Sacrifice.** You have to *give up* to go up.
3. **Maturity.** You have to *grow up* to go up.

If you show the way, people will want to follow you. The higher you go, the greater the number of people who will be willing to travel with you.

### Much of the Time Leaders Are Not at the Top

Leaders rarely remain stationary. They are constantly on the move. Sometimes they are going down the mountain to find new potential leaders. At other times they are trying to make the climb with a group of people. The best ones spend much of their time serving other leaders and lifting them up.

If you find yourself too far from your people, then you need to change. True, there will be risks. But if you want to be the most effective leader you can be, there is no viable alternative. Here's how to get started:

**1. Avoid positional thinking.** If you are in a leadership position, do not rely on your title to convince people to follow you. Build relationships. Win people over.

### 2. Realize the downsides of success and failure.

Extremes in thinking can create an unhealthy separation from others.

### 3. Understand that you are in the people business.

The best leaders know that leading people requires loving them!

**4. Buy into the Law of Significance.** "One is too small a number to achieve greatness." No accomplishment of real value has ever been achieved by a human being working alone.

If you're a leader and you feel isolated, then you're not doing something right. Loneliness on the part of a leader is a choice. Choose to take the journey with people. ●

## The Toughest Person to Lead Is Always Yourself

To be successful in any endeavor, we need to learn how to get out of our own way. That's as true for leaders as it is for anyone else. Here are four steps that can help you do that:

**1. Learn followership.** Arrogant leaders are rarely effective in the long run. They alienate their followers, their colleagues and their leaders. Learn to submit to another person's leadership and to follow well, and you will become a more humble — and effective — leader.

**2. Develop self-discipline.** To make consistently good decisions, to take the right action when needed and to refrain from taking the wrong actions requires character and self-discipline. To do otherwise is to lose control of ourselves — to do or say things we regret, to miss opportunities we are given, to spend ourselves into debt.

**3. Practice patience.** Leaders need to remember that



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the point of leading is not to cross the finish line first. It's to take people across the finish line with you. For that reason, leaders must deliberately slow their pace, stay connected to their people, enlist others to help fulfill the vision and keep people going. You can't do that if you're running too far ahead of your people.

**4. Seek accountability.** The willingness to seek and accept advice is a great indicator of accountability. If you seek it early — before you take action — you will be less likely to get off track. Most wrong actions come about because people are not being held accountable early enough.

Leading yourself well means that you hold yourself to a higher standard of accountability than others do. Why? Because you are held responsible not only for your own actions but also for those of the people you lead. Leadership is a trust, not a right. For that reason, we must “fix” ourselves earlier than others may be required to. We must always seek to do what's right, no matter how high we rise or how powerful we become. ●

### Defining Moments Define Your Leadership

What will determine whether *you* will step forward to successfully meet the challenges *you* face? The determining factor is how you handle certain critical moments in your life. These moments will define who you are as a person and as a leader. The choices we make in critical moments help to form us and to inform others about who we are. Here's why defining moments are important:

- **Defining moments show us who we really are.** They stand out because they give us an opportunity to stand up, be set apart from the rest of the crowd and seize the moment — or to remain sitting with the rest of the crowd and let it pass.
- **Defining moments declare to others who we are.** They put the spotlight on us. We have no time to put a spin on our actions. Whatever is truly inside us is revealed to everyone. Our character isn't made during these times — it is displayed!
- **Defining moments determine who we will become.** They are intersections in our lives. They give us an opportunity to turn, change direction and seek a new destination. They present options and opportunities. In these moments, we *must* choose. And the choice we make will define us. After a defining moment, we will never be the same person again.

### Defining Your Moments

Leaders become better leaders when they experience a defining moment and respond to it correctly. Any time they experience a breakthrough, it allows the people who follow them to also benefit. You can choose how you will handle defining moments when they come, and you can take steps to prepare for them. Here's how:

- 1. Reflect on defining moments from the past.** To predict how you will handle defining moments in the future, look at the ones from your past.
- 2. Prepare for defining moments in the future.** Make major choices *before* times of crisis or decision.
- 3. Make the most of defining moments in the present.** With opportunities come risks, but don't be afraid to take them. It is in moments of risk that the greatest leaders are often born. ●

### When You Get Kicked in the Rear, You Know You're Out in Front

One of the prices of leadership is criticism. When spectators watch a race, where do they focus their attention? On the front-runners! Few people pay close attention to the racers who are out of contention. Racers who are viewed as being out of the running are often ignored or dismissed. But when you're out front and ahead of the crowd, everything you do attracts attention.

If you want to be a leader, you need to get used to criticism, because if you are successful, you *will* be criticized. Certain people will always find something to be unhappy about.

### Never Work a Day in Your Life

Thomas Edison said, “I never did a day's work in my life. It was all fun!”

Following your passion is the key to finding your potential. You will not achieve the latter without pursuing the former.

Passion is an incredible asset for any person, but especially for leaders. It keeps us going when others quit. It becomes contagious and influences others to follow us. It pushes us through the toughest times and gives us energy we did not know we possessed. Passion is a real difference-maker. It separates the extraordinary from the ordinary.

The greatest job is one in which you're not sure where the line is between work and play.

### How to Hold Up Under Criticism

Since all leaders have to deal with negativity and criticism, regardless of position or profession, it's important for them to learn to handle it constructively. The following four-step process has helped many leaders deal with criticism:

**1. Know yourself. (This is a reality issue.)** Many times, when a leader is being criticized, it's really the leadership position that prompts the negative remarks, not the individual leader. You need to be able to separate the two, and you can do that only when you know yourself. If a criticism is directed at the position, don't take it personally.

**2. Change yourself. (This is a responsibility issue.)** People can change for the better only when they are open to improvement. For that reason, try to maintain the right attitude by not being defensive, looking for the grain of truth, making the necessary changes and taking the high road. If you do these things, there is a very good chance that you will learn things about yourself, improve as a leader and preserve the relationships you have with others.

**3. Accept yourself. (This is a maturity issue.)** Accepting yourself is a sign of maturity. If you worry about what other people think of you, it's because you have more confidence in their opinion than you have in your own. Executive coach Judith Bardwick says, "Real confidence comes from knowing and accepting yourself — your strengths and limitations — in contrast to depending on affirmation from others."

**4. Forget yourself. (This is a security issue.)** Secure people forget about themselves so they can focus on others. As leaders, we must always be serious about our responsibilities, but it isn't healthy for us to take ourselves too seriously. ●

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### The Best Leaders Are Listeners

The positive benefits of being a good listener are much more valuable than we often recognize. Here are some ideas about the impact of good listening related to leadership:

**1. Understanding people precedes leading them.** Leadership finds its source in understanding. To be worthy of the responsibility of leadership, a person must have insight into the human heart.

**2. Listening is the best way to learn.** It is no accident that we have one mouth and two ears. When we fail to listen, we shut off much of our learning potential.

**3. Listening can keep problems from escalating.** Good leaders are attentive to small issues. They pay

attention to their intuition. And they also pay close attention to what isn't being said. To be an effective leader, you need to let others tell you what you *need* to hear, not necessarily what you *want* to hear.

**4. Listening enables trust.** David Burns, a medical doctor and professor of psychiatry, points out: "What most people really want is to be listened to, respected and understood. The moment people see that they are being understood, they become more motivated to understand your point of view."

**5. Listening can improve the organization.** The bottom line is that when the leader listens, the organization gets better. No one can go to the highest level and take their organization there without being a good listener. ●

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### Get in the Zone and Stay There

No matter if you're just starting out or if you are at the peak of your career, the more you work in your strength zone, the more successful you will be.

Success is knowing your purpose in life, growing to your maximum potential and sowing seeds that benefit others. If you are able to do those three things, you are successful. However, none of them will be possible unless you find and stay in your strengths zone.

You don't become an effective leader by default. You must be intentional. And you must work from your strengths. You are not called to do something that you have no talent for. You will discover your purpose by finding and remaining in your strengths zone.

Similarly, you cannot grow to your maximum potential if you continually work outside of your strengths zone. Improvement is always related to ability. The greater your natural ability, the greater your potential for improvement.

#### Finding Your Own Strengths Zone

If you have an image in your mind of what talents people are supposed to have, yet you do not possess those talents yourself, then you will have a difficult time finding your true strengths. You need to discover and develop who *you* are. Here are a few suggestions to help you:

**1. Ask, "What am I doing well?"** People who reach their potential spend less time asking, "What am I doing right?" and more time asking, "What am I doing well?" The first is a moral question; the second is a talent question.

**2. Get specific.** The more specific you can get about your strengths, the better the chance you can find your "sweet spot."

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**3. Listen for what others praise.** If others are continually praising you in a particular area, start developing it.

**4. Check out the competition.** If you don't have the talent to do something better than the competition, place your focus elsewhere.

If you desire to be an effective leader, you must learn how to develop people in their areas of strength. To do that:

- **Study and know the people on your team.**
- **Communicate to individuals how they fit on the team.**
- **Communicate to all team members how each player fits on the team.**
- **Emphasize completing one another above competing with one another.** Team members need to work together for the sake of the team, not only for themselves. ●

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### A Leader's First Responsibility Is to Define Reality

One of the pitfalls that can stop potential leaders is the desire to focus on vision to the detriment of facing reality. But good leaders are both visionary *and* realistic. Reality is the foundation for positive change. If you don't face reality, then you will not be able to make necessary changes.

If you are optimistic, and you naturally encourage people, then you may need to take extra care to look reality in the eye and keep yourself grounded. Continually cast a realistic eye on:

- **The Situation.** It is often worse than you think.
- **The Process.** It usually takes longer than you think.
- **The Price.** It always costs more than you think.

If you lack realism today, then you may lack credibility with others tomorrow.

#### Embrace Realistic Thinking

The ability to define reality as a leader means embracing realistic thinking so that we can see the consequences of our actions further and with greater clarity than those around us.

Here are four practices a leader can follow:

**1. Admit your weaknesses.** You can't *define* reality if you won't *face* reality.

**2. Embrace realistic people.** An effective leadership team has members who complement one another.

**3. Ask for honesty from others.** The only way a leader will get honest feedback is by asking for it, and by treating people well when they actually give it.

**4. Invite "fresh eyes" to check you out.** Many leaders pay outside consultants to come in, observe and tell them what they see. ●

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### To See How the Leader Is Doing, Look at the People

Leaders inevitably make things better or worse for the people who follow them. Wherever you have a good leader, the team gets better, the organization gets better, the department or division gets better. And wherever you have a bad leader, everyone that leader impacts has a tougher time. Leadership makes every endeavor either better or worse.

The best leaders are highly intentional about developing their people. But good or bad, leaders always impact their people. And if you want to know whether a leader is successful and effective, don't look at — or listen to — the leader. Simply look at the people.

#### Analyzing Leadership

If you want to know how you're doing as a leader (or if you want to analyze the leadership of someone else in your organization), do it by asking the following four questions:

**Question #1.** Are the people following? If someone with a leadership position has no followers, then that person has a position but isn't really a leader. There is no such thing as a leader without followers! Every time a good leader makes the right moves with the right motives, the relationship strengthens and the team gets better.

**Question #2.** Are the people changing? People will become their best only if they are changing. And they are unlikely to change unless an effective leader is present to help facilitate the process.

**Question #3.** Are the people growing? The best leaders help people with more than their jobs; they help them with their lives. They help them become better *people*, not just better workers. And that has great power because growing people create growing organizations.

**Question #4.** Are the people succeeding? The bottom line in leadership is always results. Leaders may impress others when they succeed, but they impact others when their followers succeed. Peter Drucker observed, "Leadership is the lifting of a man's vision to higher sights, the raising of a man's performance to a higher standard, the building of a man's personality beyond its normal limitations." ●

### Don't Send Your Ducks to Eagle School

Here are three reasons why you should not try to turn ducks into eagles:

**1. If you send ducks to eagle school, you will frustrate the ducks.** Leadership is all about placing people in the right place so they can be successful. As a leader, you need to know and value your people for who they are and let them work according to their strengths. There's nothing wrong with ducks. Just don't ask them to soar or hunt from a high altitude. It's not what they do.

**2. If you send ducks to eagle school, you will frustrate the eagles.** Eagles don't want to live in a barnyard or swim in a pond. People who are used to moving fast and flying high are easily frustrated by people who want to hold them back.

### Keep Your Mind on the Main Thing

Here are five decisions leaders can make that can help them become more focused and productive:

**1. Determine not to know everything.** Successful leaders don't know everything. But they know people who do. If you're a leader and you don't have a good assistant, you're in trouble. If you have the right person in place, you can keep your mind on the main thing while your assistant thinks about everything else.

**2. Determine not to know everything first.** If every problem must be shared with leaders first, then solutions take forever. The people on the front lines are usually the ones who provide the best solutions.

**3. Determine to let someone represent you.** The decision to let others represent you requires much time and trust. This trust should not be given lightly. You must get to know the people in whom you place that trust, and they must earn it through seasons of proven performance. Once you reach that level of trust with people you work with, you will be freed up even more to remain focused on the main things that really matter.

**4. Determine to stay with your strengths and not work on your weaknesses.** Strive to stay with your strengths. In those areas of strength, you usually get good results because you remain focused.

**5. Determine to take charge of what takes your time and attention.** Take control of your calendar. You cannot fulfill your purpose if you are forever fulfilling everyone else's. If you don't take charge of your schedule, others will always be in charge of you.

**3. If you send ducks to eagle school, you will frustrate yourself.** As a leader, your job is to help your ducks to become better ducks and your eagles better eagles — to put individuals in their right places and help them reach their potential. You shouldn't ask people to grow in areas where they have no natural talent. Natural ability is not a choice. It's a gift.

It's very important for a leader to get the right people in the organization and put them in the right positions. There are few things that a leader does that are more important than this. ●

### Your Biggest Mistake Is Not Asking What Mistake You're Making

Everyone makes mistakes — large and small. To get maximum attention, make a big mistake. To cause maximum damage, fail to admit it! That will keep you from growing as a leader. When it comes to success, it's not the number of mistakes you make; it's the number of times you make the same mistake. If you want to learn to fail successfully and handle the mistakes you *do* make with maximum profit, then you need to do the following five things:

**1. Admit your own mistakes and weaknesses.** The first step toward anticipating mistakes and learning from the ones you do make is to take a realistic look at yourself and admit your weaknesses. You can't improve as a leader if you're too busy trying to pretend you're perfect.

**2. Accept mistakes as the price of progress.** Nothing is perfect in this life — and that includes you! If you want to move forward, you're going to make mistakes. If you want to reach your potential as a leader, expect to fail and make mistakes.

**3. Insist on learning from your mistakes.** People in leadership need to take their cue from scientists. In science, mistakes always precede the discovery of truth.

**4. Ask yourself and others, "What are we missing?"** Reading between the lines is essential for good leadership. We are most likely to do that when we ask the question, "What are we missing?" Asking tough questions causes people to think differently.

**5. Give the people around you permission to push back.** The best leaders invite the opinions of the people on their teams. Many good minds working together is always better than one working alone. ●

For information on managing your life, not your time go to: <http://my.summary.com>

### Keep Learning to Keep Leading

The secret to success can be found in people's daily agendas. If they do something intentional to grow every day, they move closer to reaching their potential. If they don't, their potential slowly slips away over the course of their lifetime.

If you want to be a good leader, you've got to be a good learner. If you don't have a plan for personal growth, then don't expect to grow!

As you seek to learn and grow as a leader, here are a few suggestions:

**1. Invest in yourself first.** As long as people are following you, they will be able to go only as far as you go. If you're not growing, they won't be growing — either that or they will leave and go somewhere else where they *can* grow. Followers get better after their leaders do.

**2. Be a continual learner.** If you want to lead, you have to learn. If you want to *continue* to lead, you must *continue* to learn. Successful people continue to exhibit an excitement, a curiosity or a sense of wonder.

**3. Create a growth environment for the people you lead.** To be a lifelong learner, get out of a stagnant environment and distance yourself from people who have no desire to grow. As a leader, you need to create a positive growth environment for the people you lead.

Being around people who are better than we are has a tendency to make us stretch to improve ourselves. ●

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### Leaders Distinguish Themselves During Tough Times

Every leader faces tough times — and that's when leaders distinguish themselves and show who they really are. Leading others can be very difficult and can take great courage. Every change, every challenge and every crisis requires a tough call, and the way those are handled is what separates leaders from everyone else.

How do you know when you're facing a tough call and need to be at your best as a leader? You'll know when the decision is marked by these three things:

**1. The tough call demands risk.** Leaders have to be willing to do things others are unwilling to do. They have to put themselves on the line. You can't play everything safe and expect to take people forward at the same time. Progress always requires risk.

**2. A tough call brings with it an inward battle.** Any tough call you make will be questioned. Doing the right thing isn't always easy, but it is always necessary if you want to have integrity and be effective.

**3. A tough call will distinguish you as a leader.**

When an organization not only has lost momentum but is moving in the wrong direction, that's when leaders really earn their pay! It is during those tough times that they make the toughest decisions and really distinguish themselves as leaders.

No matter how tough it gets, a real leader will keep on leading and never give up. It doesn't matter what kind of storm comes. ●

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### People Quit People, Not Companies

Some sources estimate that as many as 65 percent of people leaving companies do so because of their managers. We may say that people quit their job or their company, but the reality is that they usually quit their leaders. The "company" doesn't do anything negative to them. People do.

Most leaders can make a good impression on employees when they first meet. Add to that the optimism people have when they start a new job. They want a new job to work out. But over time, leaders will be recognized for who they really are, not who they are trying to appear to be. If a boss is a jerk, it's only a matter of time before an employee knows it.

So what kinds of people do employees quit? Most often they come in four types:

**1. People quit people who devalue them.** When leaders devalue their people, they begin to manipulate them. They start treating them like objects, not people. Look for people's value and express your appreciation for them.

**2. People quit people who are untrustworthy.** It becomes very difficult to overcome the damage done in a relationship when trust has been lost. Building and maintaining trust as a leader is a matter of integrity and communication. If you don't want people to quit you, you need to be consistent, open and truthful with them.

**3. People quit people who are incompetent.** When leaders are incompetent, they become a distraction to the team. Productivity declines, morale suffers and positive momentum becomes impossible.

**4. People quit people who are insecure.** People want to work for leaders who fire them up, not who put out their fire.

Here are things you can do to make yourself the kind of leader that other people want to follow:

- Take responsibility for your relationships with others.
- When a person leaves you, do an exit interview.
- Put a high value on those who work for you.
- Put credibility at the top of your leadership list.
- Recognize that your positive emotional health creates a secure environment for people.
- Maintain a teachable spirit and nurture your passion for personal growth. ●

### The Secret to a Good Meeting Is the Meeting Before the Meeting

To be a good leader, you have to learn to make your meetings effective. Meetings are for getting things done. To do that, you must often have a meeting before the meeting to prepare people for the meeting. Here's why:

- **The meeting before the meeting helps you receive buy-in.** If you deliver surprising news to a group of people and the most vocal and most influential react negatively, then the entire group is likely to be negative. That can take a meeting off course or bring it to a grinding halt. That's why you want to get those vocal and influential people to buy in ahead of time.
- **The meeting before the meeting helps followers gain perspective.** As the leader, you need to help followers see things as you do. That requires time and intentionality. Give influencers the right perspective before the meeting and they'll help you spread it to everyone else.
- **The meeting before the meeting helps to increase your influence.** Leadership is influence. To gain influence with people, you invest in them. If the only time you spend with individuals is in meetings, and during that time you are asking them to take care of business according to your agenda, you won't build any kind of positive relationship with people.
- **The meeting before the meeting helps you develop trust.** You can answer questions. You can more easily share your motives. You can cover details that you might not otherwise want to go into publicly. And you can tailor the message to the individual with whom you are communicating.
- **The meeting before the meeting helps you avoid being blindsided.** Even the best leaders can miss something. Sometimes during the meeting before the meeting, the person they're talking to gives them information or insight that will help them avoid making a big leadership mistake. ●

### People Will Summarize Your Life in One Sentence — Pick It Now

A legacy is something we leave for the next generation. It can be possessions that we place in the hands of others. It can be principles we lived by that carry on beyond our lives. It also can be people we have influenced whose lives are better as a result of knowing us.

Someday you are going to die. And eventually your life will be summarized in a single sentence. What do you want yours to be? Clare Booth Luce cleverly called this your "life sentence." If you are intentional about creating your legacy, people at your funeral won't have to wonder what your life sentence was.

#### Create a Legacy Worth Leaving

We can choose to live our lives from today forward in such a way that we continue to make a positive impact on others after our death. We can create a legacy worth leaving. To accomplish this, we need to do the following:

1. **Choose today the legacy you want to leave others.** Be intentional about it. That way you have the possibility of making a greater impact on a future generation.
2. **Live today the legacy you want to leave.** The greatest guarantee that you will leave the legacy you desire is how you live. Add up each action over the course of many years, and you can see your legacy beginning to take form.
3. **Appreciate today the value of a good legacy.** There is a great joy in taking others to places they have never been and to heights they have never dreamed possible. As a leader, you have a great opportunity to do those things. ●

**Note:** *Leadership Gold* has 26 chapters designed to be a six-month mentorship. Additional leadership nuggets may be mined in chapters entitled: Don't Manage Your Time, Manage Your Life; Experience Is Not The Best Teacher; Be A Connector, Not Just a Climber; The Choices You Make, Make You; Influence Should be Loaned, But Never Given; For Everything You Gain, You Give Up Something; Those Who Start the Journey with You Seldom Finish With You; Few Leaders are Successful Unless A Lot of People Want Them to Be; You Only Get Answers to the Questions You Ask. For other tools and information, visit [www.johnmaxwell.com/leadershipgold](http://www.johnmaxwell.com/leadershipgold)

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If you liked *Leadership Gold*, you'll also like:

1. ***The 360-Degree Leader* by John C. Maxwell.** Learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization with guidelines from today's foremost authority on leadership and training.
2. ***Get There Early* by Bob Johansen.** Insights confirm that the decisions leaders made yesterday will affect their organizations five years from now. Johansen shows how you can navigate the road to the future.
3. ***Leading at a Higher Level* by Ken Blanchard.** Leading management consultant Ken Blanchard shares his knowledge gathered from more than 25 years of helping leaders and organizations become great.