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One Piece of Paper

The Simple Approach to Powerful, Personal Leadership

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Leadership seems complicated to many. With competing philosophies and methods, as well as a rapidly changing workplace, is it possible to clearly, succinctly and simply convey your personal approach to leading others?

One Piece of Paper provides an authentic, accessible model for any leader to do just that. Simple, applicable and without pretense, it's real leadership for the real world.

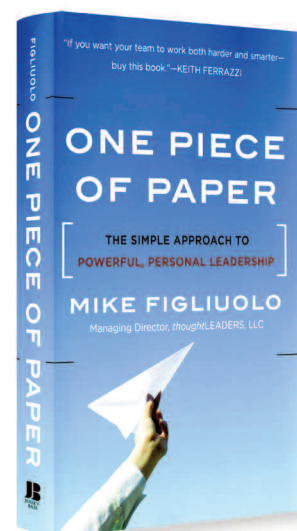
Based on leadership expert Mike Figliuolo's popular Leadership Maxims training course, *One Piece of Paper* guides you through a simple approach for creating, articulating and living your personal leadership philosophy — one that can be shared on a single piece of paper. Figliuolo's model distills leadership to four easy-to-understand aspects: leading yourself, leading the thinking, leading your people and leading a balanced life.

By answering simple, provocative questions that guide anyone to a set of personal leadership maxims, you build a living document that communicates your personal passions, goals and standards that define your leadership style. The result: one piece of paper that provides an accessible touchstone for both you and your team, enabling you to work together effectively, build your organization and achieve great results.

One Piece of Paper can help anyone achieve his or her true potential as a leader.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to determine your rules of personal conduct.
- How to innovate to drive change.
- How to lead a team as individuals rather than faceless cogs in a machine.
- How to achieve equilibrium between work and personal obligations.



by Mike Figliuolo

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: ONE PIECE OF PAPER

by Mike Figliuolo

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Part One: The Leadership Maxims Approach

Imagine being able to explain your leadership philosophy on one piece of paper — a simple 8.5-by-11-inch summation of all you are and all you want to be as a leader. How powerful would it be to have a discussion about that single page with the members of your team? They would be thrilled to have just one page to read, understand and internalize. Envision how that one page could simplify and clarify how you want your team members to conduct themselves. Think about how impressed candidates and new hires would be if they could quickly understand your standards, expectations and goals easily and from one single page.

To get a complete view of your leadership philosophy, you need to evaluate four aspects of leadership:

- *Leading yourself:* What motivates you and what are your rules of personal conduct? What do you want “future you” to look like and stand for?
- *Leading the thinking:* Where are you taking the organization and how will you innovate to drive change? What are your standards of performance for how you will safely get to your destination?
- *Leading your people:* How can you lead your people as individuals rather than treating them like faceless cogs in the machine?
- *Leading a balanced life:* If you are burned out, you are worthless. How do you define and achieve balance?

A maxim by definition is a principle or rule of conduct. In the context of the leadership maxims approach, it is a short, personally meaningful and easily explained statement that reflects one of your beliefs about leader-

ship. Maxims do not contain buzzwords (like *leverage, optimize, outside the box, win-win*). Maxims are simple, clear statements that serve as reminders for how you want your team members to behave. When written well, your leadership maxims become simple daily reminders of how you should behave so your actions are consistent with who you want to be as a leader.

Understanding the Leadership Maxims Approach

Articulating your maxims requires a process of introspection. You need to answer questions pertaining to each of the four aspects of leadership and use those questions to define your personal approach to leadership in that arena. For this to work, your answers must be open

Your One Piece of Paper

You need that one piece of paper staring you in the face every day to reinforce your maxims. It is a snapshot in time of your leadership philosophy.

Your maxims should be 15-25 bullet points, phrases, lyrics, images or sentences. Each one should evoke an emotion or remind you of a story. They need to be as personal as you can possibly make them. No corporate-speak or buzzwords allowed. If you cannot understand a maxim in one quick glance, it is too complex. If you cannot relate a personal story behind the maxim when you share it with someone else, it is not personal enough.

Your maxims will be a constant reminder of what is important to you. They are *your* rules. By evaluating them a few times a year, you can ensure that they stay relevant and continue to push you to grow as a person and as a leader.



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and honest; that is what makes your maxims authentic and easily understood by those around you. The synthesis of your answers into emotionally compelling and resonant statements will serve as the foundation for your leadership philosophy. Your answers will eventually become your personal leadership maxims.

The all-encompassing nature of your leadership maxims provides you with a means for living your leadership philosophy during every waking moment of every day. It is the constant application of your leadership maxims that strengthens the leader you are and will become. ●

Part Two: Leading Yourself

The first step in articulating your leadership maxims is determining how you will lead yourself. Nobody is going to follow you if you do not know where you are going. You need to have a clear set of goals and standards for yourself because it enables you to focus on what's important and it gives your team something to identify with and support. If you don't have a clear direction or well-articulated values, your efforts can become diluted and ineffective, and your team will very likely become confused about who you really are and what's important to you. By creating maxims focused on leading yourself, you can eliminate this potential lack of focus and confusion.

Learning to Lead Yourself

Your ability to define what you want to be in the future and to hold yourself to higher standards is the basis on which all your other maxims will build. If you are unable to inspire yourself, how can you expect to inspire your people? To determine how you are going to lead yourself, you need to explore who you are and who you want to become.

To start the introspection process, there are five questions you need to explore:

- **Why do you get out of bed every day?**
- **How will you shape your future?**
- **What guidelines do you live by?**
- **When you fall down, how do you pick yourself back up?**
- **How do you hold yourself accountable?**

Answering these questions will help you crystallize what motivates you and what your personal rules of conduct are.

Why Do You Get Out of Bed Every Day?

The better you are able to align your work with what you love to do, the more successful and fulfilled you will

be as you do it. At some point in your life, there will not be anyone else to excite you and motivate you about your work; you will need to find that motivation internally. Creating a maxim focused on what you love to do will help you choose jobs, positions or projects consistent with your passions. It will also help you avoid roles that are inconsistent with your passions, thereby keeping you out of situations where you will be unhappy with the work you are asked to do.

My maxim that answers these questions is two words: **Light bulbs.**

Light bulbs are the reason why I am excited to get to my desk to start work every day. I teach leadership, communications, strategy, and other business and professional development topics I find fascinating. I cannot help but get excited when I work with energizing and smart clients discussing their most pressing issues. These activities give me a deep sense of satisfaction.

I know that when I am teaching and make a point or connection that resonates for a participant in the class, I have had an impact on him or her. The indicator I watch for is that look on a person's face that says "You made a light bulb go on for me. I get it now. You have helped me have a moment of clarity." Turning light bulbs on for people is why I am excited to go to work.

How Will You Shape Your Future?

How do you define your future self? Focus on yourself and the person you want to become regardless of what happens in the world around you. This is about defining you first, and then, how you will react to the world. This reverses our normal way of thinking, whereby we first define the potential future world and then adapt to that external environment. To make this mental shift, you need to answer two powerful questions:

- **What do I want my epitaph to say?**
- **What do I want the summation of my career (or more loftily, my life) to be?**

These questions focus exclusively on you and what you stand for as a person. They are designed to cut through all the extraneous events and expectations surrounding you and expose the true core of your aspirations in life. Choose a maxim that inspires you to reach for goals that are personally meaningful to you in terms of how they define who you want to become.

What Guidelines Do You Live By?

Ask yourself two direct questions to define your ethical guidelines:

- **What are you willing to sacrifice to reach your goals?**

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• What are your nonnegotiables?

Those are big, weighty questions. The answers must encompass all aspects of your life, not only what you do at work. The tradeoffs you make at work are important, but by broadening the view of where this maxim applies, you can build consistency into your behaviors in multiple arenas. Consistency will strengthen those “good behavior” muscles you are trying to develop. It will also help you avoid a career-destroying moment that can happen when you have one set of ethical boundaries at work, yet behave in a manner inconsistent with those ideals during your personal time away from work. If your maxim guides your behavior both at work and at play, you reduce the risk that mistakes you make in one arena will cause difficulties in the other.

When You Fall Down, How Do You Pick Yourself Back Up?

A good leadership maxim will be your tool for refocusing yourself. I have found and relied on two maxims to help me during difficult times. One helps me reframe the situation so I can tackle it more professionally and productively. The second helps me pick myself back up after I have been battered.

I have been known to do my fair share of complaining. During one prolonged session led by me, a great boss of mine gave an exasperated sigh and said, “**It is what it is. What are you going to do about it?**”

With one statement and one question, he elegantly pointed out that the past had passed and my job was to lead my team forward. When I returned to my desk I added his comments to my leadership maxims. This maxim helps me admit I have fallen down and the task ahead is to stand up and get back in the fight.

I use something more powerful during times when it feels like the world is coming to an end. I found the perfect maxim a long time ago.

In eighth grade we were required to read *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. I read two sentences that have since changed my life on multiple occasions. Hemingway wrote: “**But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.**” Hemingway’s words were my first personal maxim. I relied on those words to keep me going during the many times I considered dropping out of West Point because the experience there was difficult.

How Do You Hold Yourself Accountable?

How will you define a maxim that will help *you* move from being accountable to being responsible? It needs to

be something that drives you to action and keeps you from laying blame at the feet of others. You are trying to write a maxim that pushes you to always be a take-charge type of leader. It is designed to prevent you from ever saying the words, “*That’s not my job.*” This maxim needs to shift your bias from observing to acting, regardless of the situation. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- **Have you ever taken charge of something not directly assigned to you, after which your involvement helped drive a successful outcome?**
- **Have you ever seen a problem, not taken responsibility for it and regretted it later?**
- **How do you keep yourself from playing the blame game?**

Do not feel limited to only answering these questions. Write down the thoughts, images, phrases and sayings that come to you as you consider the answers. Write down how you will hold yourself accountable. ●

Part Three: Leading the Thinking

Once you have defined how you will lead yourself, you need to create some maxims to get you looking forward and to set new directions for your organization. The status quo is never good enough. In fact, the best leaders I have worked with continuously challenge the thinking, blow up business models and question how they can get their organization to a better place. This is what leading the thinking is all about.

Becoming a Thought Leader

A thought leader is someone who delivers business results by agitating for and leading change.

The following questions can help you explore how you will lead the thinking. Through this part of the process, you will define your own leadership maxims that serve as daily reminders to push the thinking beyond “that’s how we’ve always done it.”

- **What standards do you hold your team to?**
- **Where are you taking your people?**
- **How will you foresee the future?**
- **After all that thinking, how will you drive action?**

The leading-the-thinking maxims you define will get you to look at problems differently. They should shake you from your usual daily routine and help you lead your organization beyond business as usual.

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What Standards Do You Hold Your Team To?

As you created maxims to guide your own behavior when you defined how you will lead yourself, you also need to provide maxims concerning performance standards for your team. Ideally, these will clearly point your team in the direction in which you want them to go. These standards will keep you and your team on track and ensure that quality remains high as all of you head toward your goals. By creating standards, you help ensure that the actions your team takes are consistent with the vision of what you want your organization to become. This clarity also reduces confusion and inefficiency caused by members of your team trying to figure out your expectations of them.

To generate a leadership maxim to explain your standards, ask yourself, “How do I want my team behaving when I am not there to give guidance? What are my expectations for how they perform?” You also need to set expectations for how you want them to deal with you, as well as what you want them to focus on as they deal with others.

Where Are You Taking Your People?

Whatever your situation or your title happens to be, the simple fact remains — you need to articulate a vision for the future state of your organization. We usually leave this up to the C-suite, but writing a vision statement at any level is a powerful exercise. Your people want to be excited to come to work. They want to be part of something bigger than they are. If you can paint a compelling future picture for them, they will be more excited to follow you to that destination. The earlier in your career you learn how to create vision statements, the more successful you will be at writing them as your responsibilities expand.

When written well, a vision statement can and should be one of your leadership maxims — that is, your vision maxim.

How Will You Foresee the Future?

Vision is great, but action is what gets you there, and for action to occur, you must first identify the opportunities and ideas on which to act.

As you create this maxim, keep two things in mind. First, it must remind you to think beyond the status quo and challenge the way things are usually done. Second, it should articulate to your team your new approach to thinking in a manner such that they too can identify new opportunities.

Here are three questions and ideas to get you started:

- What is the most innovative or visionary idea you have ever seen?
- What is the best idea you have ever had?
- What do you believe are your biggest limitations to innovation and how can you remove them?

Write down the stories, phrases, ideas and memories that come to mind as you consider these ideas.

After All That Thinking, How Will You Drive Action?

Now you need to drive action. Ideas are great, but someone has to set them in motion for them to be worthwhile.

Consider these questions:

- Do you notice any commonalities between decisions you have made and decisions others have made that you are happy with? If so, what are they?
- Are there similarities between decisions you have made and decisions others have made that you are unhappy with? What are they?
- Are there similarities between the decisions being delayed? What are they?
- What themes emerge as you look across all these decisions and what are your reactions to them?
- Does one of your stories stand out as an example you would hold up as the pinnacle of great decision making? Choose one of these stories on which to base your maxim. ●

Part Four: Leading Your People

You are a leader. Management and leadership are not the same thing. The difference: *you manage things; you lead people*. Admiral Grace Murray Hopper coined this elegant, clear distinction.

What It Means to Lead Your People

Leadership is people-focused. It is the words spoken and actions performed that inspire something deep within another person that leads that person to act independently to advance the interests of the team. Leadership is inspiring and influencing people to act in ways they ordinarily would not.

The following straightforward questions can help you define a powerful set of maxims for leading your people:

- What is your natural style?
- How will you remember to treat your team

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as individuals?

- **How will you stay connected to your team's reality?**
- **How will you commit to your people's growth?**

The maxims you create to describe how you will lead your people will govern your day-to-day interactions with members of your team.

What Is Your Natural Style?

Authentic leaders' beliefs and values do not change from one scenario to the next. Their reactions to events do not differ depending on who is listening. Their words, perspectives and opinions are spoken from the heart, and they believe deeply in all of them.

Style is the construct through which leaders demonstrate their authenticity. There are many ways to convey ideas, beliefs and values. There are just as many ways of putting ideas into action. By now you have likely found approaches for communicating and acting that are comfortable for you and other approaches that are not. Those comfortable techniques become your preferred style over time.

How Will You Remember to Treat Your Team Members as Individuals?

Write down the names of your direct reports or people you are responsible for leading on a regular basis. Leave plenty of room on the page under each of their names. Now for each person, write down as many personal things you can think of about that individual. Do not include things like their job description or their current project responsibilities. Focus on capturing things that make them unique. If you are having trouble getting started, try answering these questions:

- **Where did he or she grow up?**
- **Does he or she have children? Pets?**
- **What are his or her kids into? Sports? Performing arts?**
- **Does he or she have any hobbies?**
- **What is his or her proudest accomplishment? Biggest disappointment? Career aspiration?**

Use these questions to guide you, but write down anything else that springs to mind.

If the draft maxim you have written does not change the way you view and interact with your people, consider revising it until it does.

Coaching and Feedback

You must also provide coaching and feedback to the members of your team. Regardless of whether someone is in a stretch role or not, you need to provide guidance on a regular basis. It is easy to avoid difficult conversations, but doing so only makes subsequent conversations that much harder. Both you and your team members will benefit from your defining a maxim that pushes you to correct poor performance sooner rather than later.

How Will You Stay Connected to Your Team's Reality?

You need to create a maxim to consistently remind you to get in touch with your team's reality and see the context in which the tasks you are asking them to do must get done. If you understand and appreciate the challenges they face, you can make more reasonable and intelligent requests of them. They will also appreciate and respect you for being cognizant of what they must overcome to achieve the goals you set for them.

To create these maxims, start by getting an understanding of what you know about your team members' jobs. Take notes on the following questions:

- **What are the major deliverables your team members believe are their highest priority?**
- **Which activities consume significant amounts of the team's time yet return little in the way of results?**
- **Which difficult aspects of their jobs would your team members say you appreciate the least?**
- **What subjects would they say you should know a great deal more about?**

Once you have cataloged your lack of knowledge and understanding about what your team goes through every day, you need to do something terrifying — go speak with trusted members of your team and validate your responses to these questions.

How Will You Commit to Your People's Growth?

People expect to grow and be challenged at work. Your responsibility, as their leader, is to create that environment for them. You must calculate the risks of putting people in stretch roles and take those chances when appropriate. You have the power to give or deny them growth opportunities at work, and if you do not create those opportunities for them, either they will get

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frustrated and have low morale or they will seek challenging growth opportunities outside your organization. If your development maxim reminds you to take those risks, you improve your chances of retaining and motivating talented people. ●

Part Five: Leading a Balanced Life

The first step toward living a balanced life is realizing that both your life and your work need to be in balance. Many times we perceive this balanced life concept as only pertaining to not working late or on weekends. That is just one aspect of balance.

Another aspect is doing work you enjoy. If work sucks, life sucks. You probably spend more time at your workplace than you do with your family and friends. To achieve balance in your work, you need to define the most rewarding aspects of your job. This definition ties back to feeling challenged and effective in the work you do. Work balance consists of working on enough of the things you love to do to balance out the things you dislike doing but have to put up with at your workplace.

Creating maxims for balance at work requires you to define what is or is not acceptable behavior for you, your boss, your co-workers and your team. If you focus on finding work you enjoy and have passion for, achieving work balance will naturally flow.

There are three questions you need to answer to create your maxims for leading a balanced life:

- **How will you define your boundaries?**
- **How will you keep things in perspective?**
- **What are you passionate about?**

The maxims you build around these questions will enable you to balance your work so that you are working on enough things that excite and interest you. They will also help you put boundaries around how much working and how much living you do, help you regain perspective when you lose it and keep you focused on the most important things in your life.

This last aspect of leadership is critical. Your leadership philosophy must encompass your entire life, not just your work life.

This holistic approach is designed to create integrity and consistency in your leadership approach in any situation. It creates checks and balances between looking internally and externally; short term and long term; at work and at home. If you can have a consistent leadership approach in all these areas, you will be a more comfortable and effective leader.

How Will You Define Your Boundaries?

You are the only one who can protect your time and your interests. You have to establish “the line” you are not willing to cross or allow others to cross. Whether it is the number of hours you work, the work you do (and the work others do) or the physical layout of your workspace, there are parameters that are or are not comfortable for you. The problem is, no one knows where your line is until you tell them they have crossed it.

Unless you let others know what your comfort zone is, they will superimpose their own on you. Nine times out of 10 you will be dissatisfied with their choice. You have to set boundaries to establish those lines.

Your balance maxims must withstand the pressures that work puts on you. Invariably you will be asked to take on tasks at work that are less than exciting. Your work balance maxim is a vehicle for pushing back and trying to get an acceptable mix of exciting and unexciting work. Your life balance maxim must have the power to make you close the laptop and go home.

Creating and maintaining good boundaries helps prevent the pressures of work from pushing you out of balance. Your maxims are simply the articulation of those boundaries and serve as a way to communicate them to others and reinforce them on a regular basis.

How Will You Keep Things in Perspective?

Dan, a Chinese-American director at a financial services firm, had a simple maxim that helped him and those around him maintain perspective: **Calm**.

Dan explained it both humorously and eloquently. “It’s pretty hard to miss that I’m Asian, and even though I’ve lived in the U.S. my entire life, people always ask silly stereotypical questions like if I practice tai chi or martial arts. I always laugh at their expressions when I tell them I grew up in the mean streets of Philadelphia. That said, I have found that I’m able to exude calm during chaotic situations, and people around me respond to my calming influence. My ability to get everyone around me to stop, take a breath and relax, reduces stress and helps me and the team put things in perspective. So that’s my maxim — calm. It’s only one word, but it reminds me to stop, breathe, focus and then act.”

As Dan shared his story, it was clear how his demeanor and this maxim combined to create a powerful means of regaining perspective.

What Are You Passionate About?

A good maxim will remind you that work is a means to an end. It will enable you to make better decisions

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about where you allocate your time and energy to ensure that you have a balance between the work you do and the things you love in life.

You might think that creating your maxim for achieving balance in your life will be simple. I will caution you that it is quite difficult. The simplicity stems from your having a deep understanding of what you are excited about in life.

You likely have favored hobbies or pastimes that come readily to mind. It is easy to zero in on those as the source of raw material for creating this maxim. The difficult part is writing your maxim in such a way that the emotional trigger to take action is powerful enough to overcome the inertia of your work life. If the maxim cannot get you to step away from the laptop and leave the workplace, it is worth less than the one piece of paper it is written on. You must find an emotional trigger that creates a visceral reaction inside of you. ●

Part Six: Making It Real

At the beginning of this process, when I told you there was a way to clearly define yourself as a leader on a single page, it may have seemed like a difficult task — perhaps even impossible. But you’ve done it. And it was simple, wasn’t it? OK, perhaps “simple” is too strong a word. Let’s use “straightforward.” Articulating your leadership philosophy does not have to be complicated.

The hard parts of the leadership maxims process are the introspection about and the personalization of your philosophy. It can be difficult to remove the veil of “professionalism” and accept your own humanity. It is scary to put the real you out there for everyone to see. It is much easier to hide behind terms like synergies, value maximization and employee engagement. It is exponentially more powerful to expose the real you to the people you are supposed to lead. That is what it means to be authentic, and the more authentic and direct your leadership philosophy is, the more powerful it will be.

Living Your Maxims

Having your maxims on one piece of paper is powerful. Eventually they will change your behavior and you can take massive strides toward being the leader and the person you want to be.

Once you have written the first version of your maxims, you can start living by them. Remember, a maxim is nothing more than a principle or rule of conduct. These are your rules. You set them for yourself. You have to live with them and you will be a better leader if you abide by them.

Your maxims will help you make better decisions and choices, especially during difficult times. They will keep you on track to reach your goals and they will guide your behaviors along the way. Your maxims will serve as a tool for setting and maintaining standards for both yourself and your organization. Most important, your maxims will humanize you and help you build the trust critical to running a high-performing team.

Sharing

Share your maxims with others who are interested in your development and growth. Share them with people who care about you and who want to help you be a better leader and a better person. Share them with your team and your boss, your family and friends.

When you share your maxims with your team members, do not simply e-mail or copy your one piece of paper and distribute it without further context. Instead, have either a team meeting or one-on-one conversations with your people. Tell them that you want to share your leadership philosophy with them. Explain how that philosophy encompasses the four aspects of leadership (leading yourself, leading the thinking, leading your people and leading a balanced life). Share the process you went through to generate your maxims and help them understand how you used your personal story to define your leadership philosophy. Make it clear that your maxims are your standards and expectations not only for yourself but for them as well. Talk through each maxim and share the story behind it. Let them know who you truly are as a person. You will be surprised at how warmly your story is received.

Once they have heard your story, allow them to ask questions about it. Help them understand how your maxims will be applied to everyday situations. When they see how you will apply your maxims to situations they are familiar with, you become more predictable for them. As you finish this conversation, make it clear that you will be using your maxims every day. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *One Piece of Paper*, you’ll also like:

1. **Credibility** by James Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. Learn why leadership is, above all, a relationship, with credibility as the cornerstone, and why leaders must “Say what you mean and mean what you say.”
2. **The New Leader’s 100-Day Action Plan** by George B. Bradt, Jorge E. Pedraza, Jayme A. Check. A practical guide to help manage your leadership transition so you can take charge, build your team and deliver results.
3. **The Truth About Leadership** by James Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. Kouzes and Posner share 10 time-tested fundamental truths about leadership and becoming an effective leader.