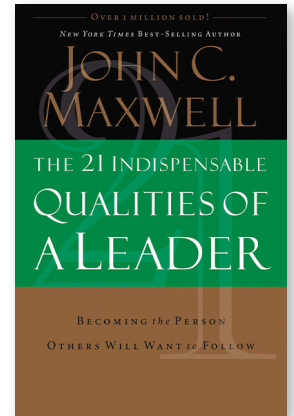


Executive Book Summaries®

The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader

Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow

by John C. Maxwell



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What do you dream of? In your wildest imagination, what do you see yourself doing? Now, what is standing between you and that dream? The answer is leadership. “Everything rises and falls on leadership,” says Dr. John C. Maxwell, “but knowing how to lead is only half the battle. Understanding leadership and actually leading are two different activities.”

What makes people want to follow a leader? The key to transforming yourself from someone who understands leadership to someone who successfully leads in the real world is character. Your character qualities activate and empower leadership — or they stand in the way of your success.

Maxwell outlines a list of 21 qualities that he has found to be common among all great leaders and he explains these characteristics in detail in *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*.

Leadership truly develops from the inside out. If you can become the leader you ought to be on the inside, you will be able to become the leader you want to be on the *outside*. People will want to follow you. “If you are able to do that,” says Maxwell, “you’ll find there’s nothing in this world you cannot do.”

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why leaders are effective because of who they are on the inside.
- How to go to the highest level of leadership by developing character qualities from the inside out.
- How true commitment inspires and attracts people.
- How to start and sustain the process of continuous personal growth.

Do You Have What It Takes to Become a Great Leader?

Do you know whether you have what it takes to become a great leader, the kind who attracts people and makes things happen? If you took the time to really look at yourself deep down, would you find the qualities needed to live out your boldest dreams, the ones so big that you've never shared them with anybody? That's a question each of us must have the courage to honestly ask — and answer — if we want to achieve our real potential.

CHARACTER

How a leader deals with the circumstances of life tells you many things about his or her character. Crisis doesn't necessarily make character, but it certainly does reveal it. Adversity is a crossroads that makes a person choose one of two paths: character or compromise. Every time a leader chooses character, he or she becomes stronger, even if that choice brings negative consequences.

The development of character is at the heart of our development not just as leaders, but as human beings.

Ask yourself whether your words and actions match — all the time. When you say you'll finish an assignment, do you always follow through? If you tell your children that you'll make it to their recital or ball game, are you there for it? Can people trust your handshake as they would a legal contract?

To improve your character, do the following:

Search for the cracks. Spend some time looking at the major areas of your life and identify anywhere you might have cut corners, compromised or let people down.

Look for patterns. Is there a particular area where you have a weakness, or do you have a type of problem that keeps surfacing?

Face the music. The beginning of character repair comes when you face your flaws, apologize and deal with the consequences of your actions.

Rebuild. Now that you've identified any areas of weakness, create a plan that will prevent you from making the same mistakes again.

CHARISMA

Most people think of charisma as something mystical, almost undefinable. They think it's a quality that comes at birth or not at all. But that's not true. Charisma, plainly

stated, is the ability to draw people to you. And like other character traits, it can be developed. One way to make yourself the kind of person who attracts others, is to "Put a '10' on every person's head." One of the best things you can do for people — which also attracts them to you — is to expect the best of them. It helps others think more highly of themselves and, at the same time, it helps you.

If you appreciate others, encourage them and help them reach their potential, they will love you for it.

How would you rate yourself when it comes to charisma? Are other people naturally attracted to you? Are you well liked? If not, you may possess one of these roadblocks to charisma: pride, insecurity, moodiness, perfectionism and cynicism.

To improve your charisma, do the following:

Change your focus. As you talk to others, determine how much of your conversation is concentrated on yourself. Determine to tip the balance in favor of focusing on others.

Play the first impression game. The next time you meet someone for the first time, try your best to make a good impression. Learn the person's name. Focus on his or her interests. Be positive. And, most important, treat him or her as a "10."

Share yourself. Make it your longterm goal to share your resources with others. Think about how you can add value to five people this year. Provide resources to help them grow personally and professionally.

COMMITMENT

If you want to be an effective leader, you have to be committed. True commitment inspires and attracts people. It shows them that you have conviction. They will believe in you only if you believe in your cause. As the Law of BuyIn states, people buy into the leader, then the vision.

Commitment starts in the heart. If you want to make a difference in other people's lives as a leader, look into your heart to see if you're really committed. The only real measure of commitment is action. And there will be times when commitment is the only thing that carries you forward.

When it comes to commitment, there are really only four types of people: cop-outs, holdouts, dropouts and all-outs. What kind of person are you? Have you been reaching your goals? Are you achieving all that you believe you can? Do people believe in you and follow you readily? If your

answer to any of these questions is no, the problem may be your level of commitment.

To improve your commitment, do the following:

Measure it. Sometimes we think we are committed to something, yet our actions indicate otherwise. Spend a few hours tallying up how you spend your time and where you spend your money. All these things are true measures of your commitment.

Know what's worth dying for. If it came down to it, what in life would you not be able to stop doing, no matter what the consequences were? Meditate on that thought, then see if your actions match your ideals.

Use the Edison method. If taking the first step toward commitment is a problem, try doing what Thomas Edison did. When he had a good idea for an invention, he would call a press conference to announce it. Then he'd go into his lab and invent it. Make your plans public and you might be more committed to following through with them.

COMMUNICATION

The success of your marriage, job and personal relationships depends greatly on your ability to communicate. People will not follow you if they don't know what you want or where you are going. You can be a more effective communicator if you simplify your message and focus on the people with whom you're communicating. As you communicate, never forget that the goal of all communication is action. If you dump a bunch of information on people, you're not communicating. Every time you speak to people, give them something to feel, something to remember and something to do.

If you know in your heart that your vision is great, yet people still do not buy into it, your problem may be an inability to communicate effectively.

To improve your communication, do the following:

Be clear as a bell. Examine a letter, memo or other item you've recently written. Are your sentences short and direct, or do they meander? Will your readers be able to grasp the words you've chosen, or will they have to scramble for a dictionary? Have you used the fewest words possible? To a communicator, your best friends are simplicity and clarity.

Refocus your attention. Pay attention to your focus when you communicate. Is it on you, your material or your audience? If it's not on people, you need to change it. Think about their needs, questions and desires. Meet people where

they are, and you will be a better communicator.

Live your message. Are there any discrepancies between what you communicate and what you do? Talk to a few trustworthy people and ask them whether you are living your message. Receive their comments without defensiveness. Then strive to make changes in your life to be more consistent.

COMPETENCE

We all admire people who display high competence, whether they are precision craftsmen, world-class athletes or successful business leaders. But the truth is that you don't have to be Michael Jordan or Bill Gates to excel in the area of competence. If you want to cultivate competence, you need to show up every day, keep improving, follow through with excellence, accomplish more than expected and inspire others.

Do you attack everything you do with fervor and perform at the highest level possible? Or is good enough sometimes good enough for you? When you think about people who are competent, you're really considering only three types of people: those who can see what needs to happen, those who can make it happen and those who can make things happen when it really counts.

To improve your competence, do the following:

Get your head in the game. If you've been mentally or emotionally detached from your work, it's time to reengage. Identify the source of the problem and create a plan to resolve it.

Redefine the standard. If you're not performing at a consistently high level, reexamine your standards. Are you shooting too low? Do you cut corners? If so, outline more demanding expectations for yourself.

Find three ways to improve. Nobody keeps improving without being intentional about it. Find three things you can do to improve your professional skills and follow through on them.

COURAGE

Eleanor Roosevelt acknowledged, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Courage deals with principle, not perception. If you don't

A leader who knows his or her priorities but lacks concentration knows what to do but never gets it done.

have the ability to see when to stand up and the conviction to do it, you'll never be an effective leader. Your dedication to potential must remain stronger than your desire to appease others.

What's ironic is that those who don't have the courage to take risks and those who do, experience the same amount of fear in life.

To improve your courage, do the following:

Face the music. Go out and do something stretching simply for the sake of growing in courage. Skydive. Perform in a play.

Talk to that person. Most people are avoiding confrontation with someone in their lives — an employee, a relative or a co-worker. If that's true for you, talk to that person this week.

Take a giant step. Maybe you've been afraid to make a career move. Take the time to really look at it. If it's the right thing to do, then do it.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment can be described as the ability to find the root of the matter, and it relies on intuition as well as rational thought. Discernment is an indispensable quality for any leader who desires to maximize effectiveness.

People who lack discernment are seldom in the right place at the right time. Although great leaders often appear to be lucky to some observers, it's more likely that leaders create their own "luck" as the result of discernment, that willingness to use their experience and follow their instincts.

Are you able to see root causes of difficult problems without having to get every bit of information? Do you trust your intuition and rely on it as much as you do your intellect and experience?

To improve your discernment, do the following:

Analyze past successes. Look at some problems you solved successfully in the past. What was the root issue in each problem? What enabled you to succeed? If you can capture the heart of the matter in a few words, you can

probably learn to do it with future issues.

Learn how others think. Which great leaders do you admire? By learning how other discerning leaders think, you can become more discerning.

Listen to your gut. Try to recall times when your intuition "spoke" to you and was correct. What do those experiences have in common? Look for a pattern that may give you insight into your intuitive ability.

One discernment-driven decision can change the entire course of your destiny.

FOCUS

What does it take to have the focus required to be a truly effective leader? The keys are priorities and concentration. A leader who knows his or her priorities but lacks concentration knows what to do but never gets it done. If he or she has concentration but no priorities, he or she has excellence without progress. But when he or she harnesses both, he or she has the potential to achieve great things.

So the important question is: How should you focus your time and energy? Use these guidelines to help you:

- Focus 70 percent on strengths — Effective leaders who reach their potential spend more time focusing on what they do well than on what they do wrong.
- Focus 25 percent on new things — Growth equals change. If you want to get better, you have to keep changing and improving.
- Focus 5 percent on areas of weakness — Nobody can entirely avoid working in areas of weakness.

How would you rate yourself in the area of focus? Have you been majoring in minor things?

To improve your focus, do the following:

Shift to strengths. Make a list of three or four things you do well in your job. Devise a plan to make changes, allowing you to dedicate 70 percent of your time to your strengths.

Staff your weaknesses. Identify three or four activities

necessary for your job that you don't do well. Determine how you can delegate the jobs to others.

Create an edge. What would it take for you to go to the next level in your main area of strength? Rethink how you do things.

GENEROSITY

Nothing speaks to others more loudly or serves them better than generosity from a leader. True generosity isn't an occasional event. It comes from the heart and permeates every aspect of a leader's life, touching his or her time, money, talents and possessions. Cultivate the quality of generosity in your life by being grateful for whatever you have, don't allow the desire for possessions to control you and develop the habit of giving.

Do you continually look for ways to add value to others? And to whom are you giving your time? Writer John Bunyan affirmed, "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." If you aren't giving in the small areas of your life, you're probably not as generous a leader as you could be.

To improve your generosity, do the following:

Give something away. Take something you truly value, think of someone you care about who could benefit from it, and give it to him or her.

Put your money to work. Put your money to work for something that will outlive you.

Find someone to mentor. Once you reach a certain level in your leadership, the most valuable thing you have to give is yourself.

INITIATIVE

Leaders must show initiative by always looking for opportunities and being ready to take action. What qualities do leaders possess that enable them to make things happen? Here are four:

- They know what they want.
- They push themselves to act.
- They take more risks.
- They make more mistakes.

Are you constantly on the lookout for opportunity, or do you wait for it to come to you? Are you willing to take steps based on your best instincts? Or do you endlessly analyze

everything? When was the last time you initiated something significant in your life? If you haven't pushed yourself lately and gotten out of your comfort zone, you may need to jump-start your initiative.

To improve your initiative, do the following:

Change your mind-set. If you lack initiative, recognize that the problem comes from inside, not from others. Find the source of your hesitation and address it.

Don't wait for opportunity to knock. Take stock of your assets, talents and resources. Doing that will give you an idea of your potential. Now, spend every day for a week looking for opportunities. Where do you see needs? Who is looking for expertise you have?

Take the next step. Pick the best opportunity you see, and take it as far as you can. Don't stop until you've done everything you can to make it happen.

LISTENING

Peter Drucker, the father of American management, estimated that 60 percent of all management problems are the result of faulty communications. And the overwhelming majority of communication problems come from poor listening.

A lot of voices are clamoring out there for your attention. As you think about how to spend your listening time, keep in mind that you have two purposes for listening: to connect with people and to learn.

Are you a good listener? When was the last time you really paid close attention to people and what they have to say? Start listening not only for words, but also for feelings, meanings and undercurrents.

To improve your listening, do the following:

Change your schedule. Do you spend time listening to your followers, customers, competitors and mentors? If you don't have all four groups on your calendar regularly, you're probably not giving them enough attention.

Meet people on their turf. A key to being a good listener is to find common ground with people. Get to know who they are and seek common ground to build your connection with them.

Listen between the lines. As you interact with people, you certainly want to pay attention to the factual content of the conversation, but don't ignore the emotional content.

PASSION

What makes it possible for people who might seem ordinary to achieve great things? The answer is passion. Nothing can take the place of passion in a leader's life.

Passion is the first step to achievement. Your desire determines your destiny. Think of great leaders and you will be struck by their passion: Gandhi for human rights, Winston Churchill for freedom, Martin Luther King Jr. for equality, Bill Gates for technology. Anyone who lives beyond an ordinary life has great desire.

Passion increases your willpower. It is the fuel for the will. If you want anything badly enough, you can find the willpower to achieve it. If you follow your passion — instead of others' perceptions — you can't help becoming a more dedicated, productive person.

To increase your passion, do the following:

Take your temperature. How passionate are you about your life and work? Does it show? You won't become passionate until you believe passion can be the difference maker in your life.

Return to your first love. Think back to when you were just starting out in your career — or even farther back to when you were a child. What could you spend hours and hours doing. Try to recapture your old enthusiasm. Then evaluate your life and career in light of those old loves.

Associate with people of passion. Passion is contagious. Schedule some time with people who can infect you with it.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

If you desire to be an effective leader, having a positive attitude is essential. It not only determines your level of contentment as a person, but it also has an impact on how others interact with you.

Your attitude is a choice. No matter what happened to you yesterday, your attitude is your choice today. Your attitude determines your actions. You can choose your attitude, you can change it.

When you meet people, do you tell yourself they'll let you down? When you face new experiences, does a voice in your head say you're going to fail?

To improve your attitude, do the following:

Feed yourself the right "food." If you've been starved of anything positive, then you need to start feeding yourself a regular diet of motivational material.

Achieve a goal every day. Set achievable daily goals for yourself. A pattern of positive achievement will help you develop a pattern of positive thinking.

Write it on your wall. As incentive, people put up awards they've won, inspirational posters or letters they've received. Find something that will work for you.

PROBLEM SOLVING

No matter what field a leader is in, he or she will face problems. They are inevitable for three reasons. First, we live in a world of growing complexity and diversity. Second, we interact with people. And third, we cannot control all the situations we face. Leaders with good problem-solving ability anticipate problems, accept the truth and handle one thing at a time. They see the big picture and they don't give up a major goal when they're down.

To improve your problem solving, do the following:

Look for trouble. If you've been avoiding problems, go out looking for them. You'll only get better if you gain experience dealing with them.

Develop a method. Some people have a hard time solving problems because they don't know how to tackle them. Try using the TEACH process:

Time — Spend time to discover the real issue.

Exposure — Find out what others have done.

Assistance — Have your team study all angles.

Creativity — Brainstorm multiple solutions.

Hit it — Implement the best solution.

Surround yourself with problem solvers. If you aren't a good problem solver, bring others onto your team who are. They will immediately complement your weaknesses and you will also learn from them.

RELATIONSHIPS

The ability to work with people and develop relationships is absolutely indispensable to effective leadership. People truly do want to go along with people they get along with. And while someone can have people skills and not be a good leader, he or she cannot be a good leader without people

If you can determine what's really a priority and release yourself from everything else, it's a lot easier to follow through on what's important.

skills. Never underestimate the power of relationships on people's lives. If your relational skills are weak, your leadership will always suffer.

To improve your relationships, do the following:

Improve your mind. If your ability to understand people needs improvement, jump-start it by reading books on the subject, then spend more time observing people and talking to them to apply what you've learned.

Strengthen your heart. Make a list of little things you could do to add value to friends and colleagues. Then try to do one of them every day. Don't wait until you feel like it to help others.

Repair a hurting relationship. Think of a valued long-term relationship that has faded. Do what you can to rebuild it.

RESPONSIBILITY

Good leaders never embrace a victim mentality. They recognize that who and where they are remain their responsibility — not that of their parents, their spouses, their children, the government, their bosses or their co-workers. They face whatever life throws at them and give it their best, knowing that they will get an opportunity to lead the team only if they've proved that they can carry the ball.

People who embrace responsibility get the job done. They're willing to do whatever it takes to complete the work needed by the organization. If you want to lead, you've got to produce.

To improve your responsibility, do the following:

Keep hanging in there. Sometimes an inability to deliver despite difficult circumstances can be due to a persistence problem. The next time you find yourself in a situation where you're going to miss a deadline, lose a deal or fail to get a program off the ground, stop and figure out how to succeed. Think outside the lines. Creativity can bring responsibility to life.

Admit what's not good enough. If you have trouble

achieving excellence, maybe you've lowered your standards. Look for places where you've let things slip. Then make changes to set higher standards.

Find better tools. If you find that your standards are high, your attitude is good and you consistently work hard but you still don't achieve the way you'd like — get better equipped. Improve your skills by taking classes, reading books and listening to tapes. Find a mentor. Do whatever it takes to become better at what you do.

SECURITY

Insecure leaders are dangerous — to themselves, their followers and the organizations they lead — because a leadership position amplifies personal flaws. Insecure leaders have several common traits: They don't provide security for others, they take more from people than they give, they continually limit their best people and they continually limit the organization.

In contrast, secure leaders are able to believe in others because they believe in themselves. They aren't arrogant; they know their own strengths and weaknesses; and they respect themselves. When their people perform well, they don't feel threatened. They go out of their way to bring the best people together and then build them up so that they will perform at the highest level. And when a secure leader's team succeeds, it brings him or her great joy. Don't let insecurity prevent you from reaching your potential.

To improve your security, do the following:

Know yourself. If you are the kind of person who is not naturally self-aware, take time to learn about yourself. Ask people who know you well to name your three greatest talents and your three greatest weaknesses and then reflect on it.

Give away the credit. If you assist others and acknowledge their contributions, you will help their careers, lift their morale and improve the organization.

Get some help. If you cannot overcome feelings of insecurity on your own, seek professional help. Get to the root of your problems not only for your own benefit but also that of your people.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

No one achieves and sustains success without self-discipline. It positions a leader to go to the highest level and is key to leadership that lasts. If you can determine what's really a priority and release yourself from everything else, it's a lot easier to follow through on what's important. And that's the essence of self-discipline.

Self-discipline can't be a one-time event. It has to become a lifestyle. To develop a lifestyle of discipline, one of your tasks must be to challenge and eliminate any tendency to make excuses. The next time you're facing a must-do task and you're thinking of doing what's convenient instead of paying the price, change your focus. Count the benefits of doing what's right and then dive in.

If you know you have talent and you've seen a lot of motion — but little concrete results — you may lack self-discipline.

To improve your self-discipline, do the following:

Sort out your priorities. Think about which two or three areas of life are most important to you and the disciplines that you must develop to keep growing and improving in those areas.

List the reasons. Write out the benefits of practicing the disciplines you've just listed. Post the benefits where you will see them daily. On the days when you don't want to follow through, reread your list.

Get rid of excuses. Write down every reason why you might not be able to follow through with your disciplines. Even if a reason seems legitimate, find a solution to overcome it. Don't leave yourself any reasons to quit.

SERVANTHOOD

Servanthood is not about position or skill. It's about attitude. You have undoubtedly met people in service positions who have poor attitudes toward servanthood: the rude worker at the government agency, the waiter who can't be bothered with taking your order, the store clerk who talks on the phone with a friend instead of helping you.

Just as you can sense when a worker doesn't want to help people, you can just as easily detect whether a leader has a servant's heart. And the truth is that the best leaders desire to serve others, not themselves. The first mark of servanthood is the ability to put others ahead of yourself and your personal desires.

Where is your heart when it comes to serving others? Are

you motivated by a desire to help others?

To improve your servanthood, do the following:

Perform small acts. Find ways to do small things that show others that you care.

Learn to walk slowly through the crowd. The next time you attend a function make it your goal to connect with others by circulating among them and talking to people; getting to know their needs, wants and desires.

Move into action. If an attitude of servanthood is conspicuously absent from your life, the best way to change it is to start serving. Sign up to serve others at your church, a community agency or a volunteer organization.

TEACHABILITY

Leaders face the danger of contentment with the status quo. After all, if a leader already possesses influence and has achieved a level of respect, why should he or she keep growing? The answer is — your growth determines who you are, and who you are determines who you attract, and who you attract determines the success of your organization.

If you want to grow your organization, you have to remain teachable. Some people mistakenly believe that if they can accomplish a particular goal, they no longer have to grow. It can happen with almost anything: earning a degree, reaching a desired position, receiving a particular award or achieving a financial goal. But effective leaders cannot afford to think that way. The day they stop growing is the day they forfeit their potential — and the potential of the organization.

If you're not where you hoped you would be by this time in your life, your problem may be lack of teachability.

To improve your teachability, do the following:

Observe how you react to mistakes. Do you admit your mistakes? Do you apologize when appropriate? Or are you defensive? If you react badly — or make no mistakes at all — you need to work on your teachability.

Try something new. Go out of your way to do something different that will stretch you mentally, emotionally or physically.

Learn in your area of strength. Continue to learn in an area where you are already an expert. This prevents you from becoming jaded and unteachable.

VISION

Vision is everything for a leader. It is utterly indispensable. Why? Because vision leads the leader. It paints the target. It sparks and fuels the fire within, and draws him or her forward. It is also the fire lighter for others who follow that leader.

Show me a leader without vision and I'll show you someone who isn't going anywhere. At best, he or she is traveling in circles. When you look deep into your heart and soul for a vision, what do you see?

To improve your vision, do the following:

Measure yourself. Talk to your spouse, a close friend and key employees. Ask them to state what they think your vision is. If they can articulate it, then you are probably living it.

Write it down. If you've thought about your vision but never put it in writing, take the time to do it. Once you've written it, evaluate whether it is worthy of your life's best. Then pursue it with all you've got.

Do a gut check. If you haven't done a lot of work on vision, spend the next several weeks or months thinking about it. Consider what really impacts you at a gut level. What makes you cry? What makes you dream? What gives you energy? And think about what you'd like to see change in the world around you. What do you see that isn't — but could be?

who will mentor you. The only way to become the kind of leader that people want to follow is to keep growing and learning about leadership.

Conclusion & Advice

Keep growing as a leader. Put yourself on a regular program where you consistently read books, listen to tapes and attend conferences that stretch you. Find other leaders



John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker and author who has sold more than 13 million books. A *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* best-selling author, Maxwell was named the World's Top Leadership Guru by Leadershipgurus.net. Three of his books, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, *Developing the Leader Within You* and *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* have each sold more than 1 million copies.

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