

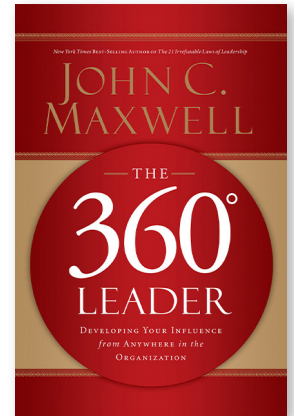


# Executive Book Summaries<sup>®</sup>

# The 360 Degree Leader

Developing Your Influence From Anywhere in the Organization

by **John C. Maxwell**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

These are classic pictures of leadership: William Wallace leading the charge of his warriors against the army that would oppress his people. Winston Churchill defying the Nazi threat as much of Europe had collapsed. Mahatma Gandhi leading a 200-mile march to the sea to protest the Salt Act. Mary Kay Ash going off on her own to create the world-class organization Mary Kay Cosmetics. Martin Luther King Jr. standing before the Lincoln Memorial challenging the nation with his dream of reconciliation.

Each of these people was a great leader. Each made an impact that has touched millions of people. Yet these pictures can also be misleading. The reality is that 99 percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization. Usually, an organization has only one person who is the leader. So, what do you do if you are not that one person?

You can learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization by becoming a 360-degree leader. You can learn to lead up, lead across and lead down. Only 360-degree leaders influence people at every level of the organization. By helping others, they help themselves.

## IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Disprove the myths believed by many people in the middle of an organization.
- Deal with the most common challenges faced by people in the middle of an organization.
- Lead your boss, your colleagues and your followers.
- Overcome the setbacks and obstacles you will face on the road to becoming a 360-degree leader.
- Quantify the value of 360-degree leadership.

### The Myths of Leading From the Middle

#### The Position Myth

The number one misconception people have about leaders is the belief that leadership comes simply from having a position or title. But nothing could be further from the truth. You don't need to possess a position at the top of your group, department, division or organization in order to lead. If you think you do, then you have bought into the position myth.

The true measure of leadership is influence — nothing more, nothing less. Leadership is dynamic, and the right to lead must be earned individually with each person you meet. Where you are on the “staircase of leadership” depends on your history with that person.

Position has little to do with genuine leadership. Influencing others is a matter of disposition, not position. Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit. Anyone can choose to become a leader wherever he or she is. You can make a difference no matter where you are.

#### The Destination Myth

Those who believe the destination myth might say, “When I get to the top, then I'll learn to lead.”

But, if you want to succeed, you need to learn as much as you can about leadership before you have a leadership position. Good leadership is learned in the trenches. If you don't try out your leadership skills and decision-making process when the stakes are small and the risks are low, you're likely to get into trouble at higher levels when the cost of mistakes is high, the impact is far-reaching, and the exposure is greater. Mistakes made on a small scale can be easily overcome. Mistakes made when you're at the top cost the organization greatly and they damage a leader's credibility.

Start now to adopt the thinking, learn the skills, and develop the habits of the person you wish to be. Handle today so that it prepares you for tomorrow.

#### The Influence Myth

Those who believe the influence myth might say, “If I were on top, then people would follow me.”

People who have no leadership experience have a tendency to overestimate the importance of a leadership title. You may be able to grant someone a position, but you cannot grant him or her real leadership. Influence must be earned.

A position gives you a chance. It gives you the opportunity to try out your leadership. It asks people to give you the benefit of the doubt for a while. But given some time, you will earn your level of influence — for better or worse. Good leaders will gain in influence behind their stated position. Remember, a position doesn't make a leader, but a leader can make a position.

#### The Inexperience Myth

Although the desire to improve an organization and the belief that you're capable of doing it are often the marks of a leader, without experience being the top person in an organization, you would likely overestimate the amount of control you have at the top. The higher you go and the larger the organization, the more you realize that many factors control the organization. More than ever, when you are at the top, you need every bit of influence you can muster. Your position does not give you total control — or protect you.

#### The Freedom Myth

Those who believe the freedom myth might say, “When I get to the top, I'll no longer be limited.”

But when you move up in an organization, the weight of your responsibility increases. In many organizations, as you move up the ladder, you may even find that the amount of responsibility you take on increases faster than the amount of authority you receive. When you go higher, more is expected of you, the pressure is greater, and the impact of your decisions weighs more heavily. Leaders have more obligations and, because of that, they become more limited in terms of their freedom. It is a limitation they choose willingly, but they are limited just the same.

#### The Potential Myth

Someone who believes the potential myth would say, “I can't reach my potential if I'm not the top leader.”

People should strive for the top of their game, not the top of the organization. Each of us should work to reach our potential, not necessarily the corner office. Sometimes you can make the greatest impact from somewhere other than first place.

#### The All-or-Nothing Myth

Someone who believes the all-or-nothing myth might say, “If I can't get to the top, then I won't try to lead.”

Some people in the middle become frustrated by their position in an organization because they define success as

being “on top.” As a result, they believe that if they are not on top, they are not successful. If that frustration lasts long enough, they can become disillusioned, bitter and cynical. If it gets to that point, instead of being a help to themselves and their organization, they become a hindrance.

Improve your leadership and you can impact your organization. You can change people’s lives. You can be someone who adds value. You can learn to influence people at every level of the organization — even if you never get to the top. By helping others, you can help yourself.

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## The Challenges 360-Degree Leaders Face

### The Tension Challenge

This challenge comes from the pressure of being caught in the middle. It’s not enough to merely recognize that leading from somewhere in the middle of an organization can be stressful. You need to learn how to relieve the tension. Here are five suggestions:

- **Become comfortable with the middle.** Being in the middle can be a great place — as long as you have bought into the vision and believe in the leader.
- **Know what to own and what to let go.** Nothing frees a person from tension like clear lines of responsibility.
- **Find quick access to answers when caught in the middle.**
- **Never violate your position or the trust of the leader.**
- **Find a way to relieve stress.**

### The Frustration Challenge

This challenge results from following an ineffective leader.

Your job isn’t to fix the leader; it’s to add value. The only time that is not true is when the leader above you is unethical or criminal. If the leader won’t change, then change your attitude or your work address.

When you find yourself following a leader who is ineffective, do the following:

- **Develop a solid relationship with your leader, find common ground, and build a solid professional relationship.**

- **Identify and appreciate your leader’s strengths.** Find them and think about how they might be assets to the organization.
- **Commit yourself to adding value to your leader’s strengths.**

### The Multi-Hat Challenge

Leaders in the middle must perform tasks and have knowledge beyond their personal experience. And they often are forced to deal with multiple shifting priorities, often with limited time and resources.

Every role or “hat” you are asked to wear has its own responsibilities and objectives. If you change hats, keep in mind that the context changes. The goal often determines the role and the approach to take. Don’t use one hat to accomplish a task required for another hat. When you change hats, don’t change your personality. And don’t neglect any hat you are responsible to wear.

### The Ego Challenge

It’s normal for any person to want recognition, and leaders are the same. The fact that leaders in the middle of the pack are often hidden — and as a result they don’t get the credit or recognition they desire and often deserve — can be a real ego buster. The challenge is to be a team player and remain content while contributing.

Here’s how to do that:

- **Concentrate more on your duties than your dreams.**
- **Appreciate the value of your position.**
- **Find satisfaction in knowing the real reason for the success of a project.**
- **Embrace the compliments of others in the middle of the pack.**
- **Understand the difference between self-promotion and selfless promotion.**

### The Fulfillment Challenge

The right attitude is absolutely essential to contentment in the middle of an organization. Truly, leadership is more disposition than position. With the right attitude and the right skills, you can influence others from wherever you are in an organization. Here are five ways to develop an attitude of contentment and fulfillment right where you are:

- **Develop strong relationships with key people.**

- **Define a win in terms of the team.**
- **Engage in crucial communication.**
- **Gain experience and maturity.**
- **Put the team above your personal success.**

Leadership is about helping others win.

### The Vision Challenge

Championing the vision is more difficult when you did not create it. The key to successfully navigating the vision challenge is this: The more you invest in the vision, the more it becomes your own. Even though your own vision may excite you more than someone else's, to get the opportunity to pursue your own dreams, you will almost certainly have to succeed in achieving the dreams of others.

### The Influence Challenge

Leading others beyond your position is not easy. Leadership is influence. If you have neither position nor influence, people will not follow you. And the further outside your position they are, the less likely they are to let you lead them. That's why 360-degree leaders work to change their thinking from, "I want a position that will make people follow me," to, "I want to become a person who people will want to follow."

People follow leaders they know, leaders who care. If leaders care about each individual as a person, then people respond well to them. The greater the depth of their concern, the broader and longer-lasting their influence.

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## The Principles 360-Degree Leaders Practice to Lead Up

Leading up is the 360-degree leader's greatest challenge. Most leaders want to lead, not be led. But most leaders also want to have value added to them. If you take the approach of wanting to add value to those above you, you have the best chance of influencing them.

Your underlying strategy should be to support your leader, add value to the organization, and distinguish yourself from the rest of the pack by doing your work with excellence. If you do these things consistently, then in time the leader above you may learn to trust you, rely on you, and look to you for advice. With each step, your influence will increase and you will have more and more opportunities to lead up.

### Lead Yourself Exceptionally Well

Nothing will make a better impression on your leader than

your ability to manage yourself. If your leader must continually expend energy managing you, then you will be perceived as someone who drains time and energy. If you manage yourself well, however, your boss will see you as someone who maximizes opportunities and leverages personal strengths. To become someone your leader turns to when the heat is on, manage your emotions, time, priorities, energy, thinking, words, and your personal life.

### Lighten Your Leader's Load

If you help lift the load, then you help your leader succeed. When the boss succeeds, the organization succeeds. Lifting shows you are a team player. It shows gratitude for being on the team and makes you part of something bigger. It also gets you noticed and increases your value and influence.

How do you lift your leader's load? Do your own job well first. When you find a problem, provide a solution. Tell leaders what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. Go the second mile and do more than is asked. Also, stand up or stand in for your leader whenever you can.

### Be Willing to Do What Others Won't

Successful people do the things that unsuccessful people are unwilling to do. Few things gain the appreciation of a top leader more quickly than an employee with a whatever-it-takes attitude. That means taking the tough jobs. You learn resiliency and tenacity during tough assignments, not easy ones. When tough choices have to be made and results are difficult to achieve, leaders are forged. That means that you will have to sacrifice some personal goals for the sake of others. You will have to do something because it matters, not because it will get you noticed. Good leaders also find a way to succeed with people who are hard to work with by finding common ground and connecting with them.

### Do More Than Manage — Lead!

To move beyond management to leadership, you need to broaden your mindset and begin thinking like a leader. If you are already leading well, then use this as a checklist to see where you need to keep growing:

- **Think longer term.**
- **See within the larger context of how something will impact those above and beside you.**
- **Push boundaries to find a better way.**
- **Emphasize intangibles such as morale, mo-**

**tivation, momentum, emotions, attitudes, atmosphere and timing.**

- **Rely on intuition.** As Dr. Joyce Brothers says, “Trust your hunches. They’re usually based on facts filed away just below the conscious level.”
- **Look for good people and invest in them to the point where they can be released and empowered to perform.**
- **Be an agent of change.** Leaders want more than just to see progress — they want to make it happen.

### Invest in Relational Chemistry

All good leadership is based on relationships. People

won’t go along with you if they can’t get along with you. That’s true whether you are leading up, across or down.

The key to developing chemistry with our leaders is to develop relationships with them by listening to their heartbeat to understand what makes them tick, knowing their priorities, catching their enthusiasm, supporting their vision, connecting with their interests, conforming to their personality, earning their trust, learning to work with their weaknesses, and respecting their family.

### Be Prepared Every Time You Take Your Leader’s Time

For all leaders, time is precious. For that reason, you must always be prepared when you take any of your leader’s time.

Whether you have unlimited access to your boss or you only get a few minutes on rare occasions, you need to think and plan ahead. Don’t make your boss think for you, and bring something to the table.

### Know When to Push and When to Back Off

Successful leaders make the right move at the right moment with the right motive. Timing is critically important to leadership. When it comes to gaining influence with your boss, timing is equally important.

It’s wise to wait for the right moment to speak up. A great idea at the wrong time will be received just the same as a bad idea. Of course, there are times when you must speak up, even if the timing doesn’t seem ideal. The trick is knowing which is which.

### Become a Go-To Player

Few things elevate a person above his or her peers the way

becoming a go-to player does. Everyone admires go-to players and looks to them when the heat is on — not only their leaders, but also their followers and peers. Go-to players produce when the pressure is on. They are the people who find a way to make things happen no matter what.

If you adopt the positive tenacity of a go-to player and take every opportunity to make things happen, your leader will come to rely on you. If you have the willingness and the capacity to lift the load of your leaders when they need it, you will have influence with them.

### Be Better Tomorrow Than You Are Today

Often, when people get to their desired destination, they stop striving to grow or improve.

There’s certainly nothing wrong with the desire to progress in your career, but never try to “arrive.” Instead, intend your journey to be open-ended. Most people have no idea how far they can go in life. They aim way too low. The key to personal development is being more growth oriented than goal oriented. There is no downside to making growth your goal. If you keep learning, you will be better tomorrow than you are today, and that can do many things for you.

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## The Principles 360-Degree Leaders Practice to Lead Across

To succeed as a 360-degree leader who leads peer-to-peer, you have to work at giving your colleagues reasons to respect and follow you. You can do that by helping your peers win. If you can help them win, you will not only help the organization, but also yourself.

### Understand, Practice and Complete the Leadership Loop

If you want to gain influence and credibility with people working alongside you, don’t try to take shortcuts or cheat the process. Instead, you have to show people that you care about them by taking an interest in them. Make an effort to get to know them as individuals. You should also strive to see others’ unique experiences and skills as resources and try to learn from them.

When you go out of your way to add value to your peers, they understand that you really want them to win with no hidden agenda of your own. Affirm them by praising their strengths and acknowledging their accomplishments.

### Put Completing Fellow Leaders Ahead of Competing With Them

In healthy working environments, there is both competition and teamwork. The issue is to know when each is appropriate. When it comes to your teammates, you want to compete in such a way that instead of competing with them, you are completing them.

Winning at all costs will cost you when it comes to your peers. If your goal is to beat your peers, then you will never be able to lead across with them. How do you balance competing and completing? First, acknowledge your natural desire to compete and channel it in a positive way. Embrace healthy competition. The whole goal of healthy competition is to leverage it for the corporate win.

### Be a Friend

We often consider ourselves to be many things to the people who work alongside us — co-workers, teammates, contributors, competitors — but we often forget to be the one thing that every person wants: a friend. Poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The glory of friendship is not in the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is in the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him.”

A great approach to friendship at work is to make it your goal to be a friend, not to find a friend. As you reach out to your co-workers, listen, find common ground not related to work, be available beyond business hours, have a sense of humor, and tell the truth when others don't.

### Avoid Office Politics

Playing politics is changing who you are or what you normally do to gain an advantage with whomever currently has power. In work environments, this may mean sucking up to the boss, constantly changing positions to get on the winning side, or using people for personal gain without regard for how it affects them. Political people are fickle and opportunistic, doing what's expedient in the moment to win, regardless of what's best for their peers, their employees or the organization.

In the long run, integrity, consistency and productivity always pay off — in better teamwork and a clear conscience. To avoid office politics, avoid gossip; stay away from petty arguments; stand up for what's right, not for what's popular; look at all sides of the issue; don't protect your turf; and say what you mean and mean what you say.

### Expand Your Circle of Acquaintances

If you want to expand your influence, you have to expand your circle of acquaintances.

Expanding your circle of acquaintances helps you improve, exposes you to new ideas, and prompts you to see things from a different point of view, which will help you generate new ideas of your own. It will help you to learn new working methods and pick up additional skills. And it will help you to become more innovative. Expanding your circle also expands your network, putting you into contact with more people and giving you potential access to their networks.

### Let the Best Idea Win

Leaders in the middle of the organization who help to surface good ideas are creating what an organization needs most. They do that by producing synergy among their peers. And they will develop influence with their peers because when they are present, they make the whole team better.

To generate good ideas, 360-degree leaders listen to all ideas and never settle for just one idea. They also look in unusual places for ideas. Don't let the personality of someone with whom you work cause you to lose sight of the greater purpose, which is to add value to the team and advance the organization. If that means listening to the ideas of people with whom you have no chemistry, or worse, a difficult history, so be it. A 360-degree leader protects creative people and their ideas.

### Don't Pretend You're Perfect

Since nobody is perfect, we need to quit pretending. People who are real, who are genuine concerning their weaknesses as well as their strengths, draw others to them. They engender trust. They are approachable. And they are a breath of fresh air in an environment where others are scrambling to reach the top by trying to look good. To “get real,” admit your faults, ask for advice, worry less about what others think, be open to learning from others, and put away pride and pretense.

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## The Principles 360-Degree Leaders Practice to Lead Down

What makes 360-degree leaders unique — and so effective — is that they take the time and effort to earn influence with their followers just as they do with those over whom they have no authority.

As a 360-degree leader, when you lead down, you are

doing more than just getting people to do what you want. You are finding out who they are, helping them to discover and reach their potential, showing the way by becoming a model they can follow, helping them become a part of something bigger than they could create on their own, and rewarding them for being contributors on the team.

### **Walk Slowly Through the Halls**

One of the best ways to stay connected to your people and keep track of how they are doing is to approach the task informally as you move among them. To connect with people, you travel at their speed. Express that you care and create a healthy balance of personal and professional interest. Professional interest shows that you have the desire to help them. That is something all good leaders share. Personal interest goes deeper — it shows your heart. When you take interest in your people as human beings, you need to be sure not to cross the line. There is a point at which interest becomes inappropriate.

### **See Everyone as a ‘10’**

Three-hundred-and-sixty-degree leaders get more out of their people because they think more of their people. They respect and value them and, as a result, their people want to follow them. The positive, uplifting attitude that they bring to leadership creates a positive working environment where everyone on the team has a place and purpose, and where everyone shares in the win.

To shine in this area, see people as they can become. Let them borrow your belief in them. Catch them doing something right. Give them the benefit of the doubt. And understand that people usually rise to the leader’s expectations.

Begin today to see and lead people as they can be, not as they are, and you will be amazed by how they respond to you. Not only will your relationship with them improve and their productivity increase, but you also will help them rise to their potential.

### **Develop Each Team Member as a Person**

There is much more to good leadership than just getting the job done. Getting the job done makes you a success. Getting the job done through others makes you a leader. But developing people while helping them get the job done at the highest level makes you an exceptional leader.

In order to develop your staff, you need to keep growing yourself. Understand that development is a longterm process. Development is based on the needs of your people: You give

them what they need in order to become better people. To do that well, you need to know people’s dreams and desires.

Take responsibility for conforming your leadership style to what your people need, not expecting them to adapt to you. As a leader, your first responsibility is to help others define the reality of who they are. Sometimes that means having difficult conversations. The thing you need to remember is that people will work through difficult things if they believe you want to work with them.

### **Place People in Their Strength Zones**

When employees are continually asked to perform in an area of weakness, they become demoralized, they are less productive, and they eventually burn out.

Successful people find their own strength zones. Successful leaders find the strength zones of the people they lead. When you place individuals in their strength zones, you change people’s lives for the better, their jobs become rewarding and fulfilling, and you help both the organization and yourself. The ability to help people find the best place means discovering their true strengths, giving them the right job, identifying the skills that they’ll need, and providing world-class training.

### **Model the Behavior You Desire**

Leaders set the tone and the pace for all the people working for them. Therefore, leaders need to be what they want to see. Your behavior determines the culture. Your attitude determines the atmosphere. Your values determine the decisions. If your decisions are not consistent with your values, they are always short-lived. Your investment determines the return. Your character determines the trust. Your work ethic determines the productivity. Your growth determines the potential.

Followers become like their leaders. They are influenced by their leaders’ values. They adopt their working methods. They even emulate many of their quirks and habits. That’s why we must always be aware of our own conduct before criticizing the people who work for us. If you don’t like what your people are doing, first take a look at yourself.

### **Transfer the Vision**

As a leader in the middle of the organization, you will be transferring what is primarily the vision of others. Leaders in the middle may not always be the inventors of the vision; they are almost always its interpreters.

To interpret the vision in a way that fires up people and sets them off in the right direction, include the following elements: clarity; connection of past, present and future; purpose; goals; a challenge; stories that make the vision relational and warm; and passion. If there is no passion in the picture, then your vision isn't transferable.

### Reward for Results

Whatever actions leaders reward will be repeated. That is why it is very important to reward results and to do it the right way. To reward results most effectively, give praise publicly and privately, back up praise with money, don't reward everyone the same, give perks beyond pay, promote when possible, and remember that you get what you pay for.

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## The Value of 360-Degree Leaders

Becoming a 360-degree leader isn't easy. It takes much work and it doesn't happen overnight. But it is worth every bit of the effort.

As you seek to grow as a leader, you will not always succeed. You will not always be rewarded the way you should be. Your leaders may not listen to you at times.

Your peers may ignore you. Your followers won't follow. And the battle may feel like it's uphill all the way.

Don't let that discourage you. By becoming a better leader, you add tremendous value to your organization. Everything rises and falls on leadership.

The following are five values that 360-degree leaders add to their organizations:

### 1. A leadership team is more effective than just one leader.

Organizations need to develop leadership teams at every level. A group of leaders working together is always more effective than one leader working alone. And for teams to develop at every level, they need leaders at every level.

As a leader in the middle, if you develop a team, you will be making your organization better and helping it to fulfill its vision. You will be adding value no matter where you serve in the organization. As you do that, keep in mind that visionary leaders are willing to hire people better than themselves, wise leaders shape their people into a team, secure leaders focus on others and want them to do well, experienced leaders listen to their teams, and productive leaders understand that

one is too small a number to achieve greatness.

### 2. Leaders are needed at every level of the organization.

If a team starts out with a vision but without a leader, it is in trouble. Why? Because vision leaks. And without a leader, the vision will dissipate and the team will drift until it has no sense of direction. On the other hand, if a team starts out with a leader but without a vision, it will do fine because it will eventually have a vision. Leaders are always headed somewhere. They have vision, and that vision gives not only them direction but it gives their people direction.

Without a leader, decisions are delayed, agendas are multiplied, conflicts are extended and morale is low. Without a leader, production is low and success is difficult.

### 3. Leading successfully at one level is a qualifier for leading at the next level.

Growing organizations are always looking for good people to step up to the next level and lead. To find out if a person is qualified to make the jump, they look at that person's track record in his or her current position. Leadership is a journey that starts where you are, not where you want to be. Great responsibilities come only after handling small ones well.

### 4. Good leaders in the middle make better leaders at the top.

Good leaders maximize the performance of those on their team. They set direction. They inspire their people and help them work together. They get results.

Good leaders bring out the best, not only in their followers but also in other leaders. Good leaders raise the bar when it comes to performance and teamwork, and this often challenges other leaders in the organization to improve.

Leaders in the middle of an organization are closer to the people in the trenches than the leaders on top. As a result, they know more about what's going on. They understand the people who are doing the work and the issues they face. They also have greater influence at those lower levels than the top leaders.

Today's workers are tomorrow's leaders in the middle of the organization. And today's leaders in the middle will be tomorrow's leaders at the top. While you function as a 360-degree leader in the middle of the organization, if you keep growing you will probably get your opportunity to become a top leader. But at the same time, you need to be

looking at the people working for you and thinking about how you can prepare them to eventually take your place in the middle.

### **5. Three-hundred-and-sixty-degree leaders possess qualities every organization needs.**

The 360-degree leader possesses qualities that every organization wants to see in all of its employees, especially in its leaders. These include the following:

- **Adaptability:** Quickly adjusting to change.
- **Discernment:** Understanding the real issues.
- **Perspective:** Seeing beyond your own vantage point.
- **Communication:** Linking to all levels of the organization.
- **Security:** Finding identity in self, not the position.
- **Servanthood:** Doing whatever it takes.
- **Resourcefulness:** Finding creative ways to make things happen.
- **Maturity:** Putting the team before oneself.
- **Endurance:** Remaining consistent in character and competence over the long haul.
- **Countability:** Being able to be counted on when it counts.



John C. Maxwell, known as America's expert on leadership, has communicated his leadership principles to Fortune 500 companies, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and sports organizations such as the NCAA, the NBA and the NFL. He is the founder of several organizations, including Maximum Impact. He is the author of more than 30 books, including *Developing the Leader Within You*, *Your Road Map for Success*, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, and *Winning with People*.

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