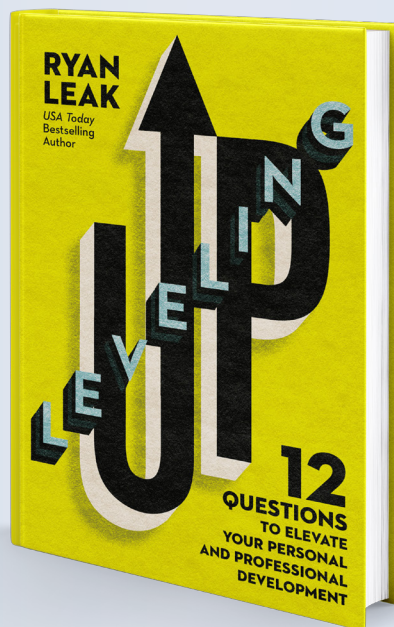


# BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



## Leveling Up

12 Questions to Elevate Your Personal and Professional Development

By Ryan Leak

**Ryan Leak** is an author, speaker, executive coach, and filmmaker. He's known for two documentaries: *The Surprise Wedding* and *Chasing Failure*. The son of a preacher man, Ryan grew up in the church with a marketplace passion. Today, Ryan splits his time between speaking in churches and doing executive coaching and speaking in Corporate America through his company The Ryan Leak Group, LLC.

## Focus On the Person You're Becoming

Ryan Leak, in his book, *Leveling Up: 12 Questions to Elevate Your Personal and Professional Development*, presents his reader with twelve questions to consider regarding how they conduct both their personal and their professional lives. Leak believes that by considering the answers to these questions, people will begin to notice the areas they can improve on which will help them go on to live more fulfilling lives defined by their own idea of what success is. Shortly into his introduction Leak explains that many people believe that their own leveling up is someone else's responsibility. "But leveling up is your responsibility. It starts with you," he says.

He then goes on to list the six stages that people are generally residing in in their life. They are as follows: aimless, stuck, coasting, developing, thriving, and mastery. The ideas in his book are meant to help people move up to the next level. He believes that questions help people do this "better than answers because questions equip people to lead themselves when no one else is around."

Leak starts off his list of questions by asking the reader what his or her definition of success is. Leak grew up in a poorer neighborhood but attended a private school in a wealthier neighborhood. This gave him a first hand glimpse into how different communities define success. He believes that the first step a person needs to take to define success for themselves is to examine their current definition of success. Then, people can go through the success criteria to determine where the criteria came from and if they are worthy of keeping. It is important for people to understand where their ideas of success originated from as often they are based in what the person previously wanted but may not want anymore.

He says, "To find true success is to understand where your current definition of success comes from and make it yours." People must define success on their own terms. He believes that unless people clearly state what they consider to be successes, they will never know when to celebrate those successes, and they will be merely moving from one place to the next.

The next question Leak considers regards self-awareness as he asks his readers to consider what it is like to be on the other side of them: what it is like to work with them, live with them, and

do life with them. Many people, he believes, lack this awareness, and oftentimes it is the people who think they are the most self-aware who lack this trait the most. He wants people to consider what it is like to be on the other side of their facebook posts, emails, texts, as well as what it is like to be coached by them, led by them, and be friends with them. He urges people to err on the side of caution by assuming that they are not self-aware. He believes it is quite easy to start to believe a version of ourselves and reality that is partially based in truth and partially based in myth. He says, “One of the biggest myths about growing in your life and career is believing that it’ll happen when somebody else changes. You will grow when you change.” He believes that truly self-aware people are aware of their strengths, shortcomings, and their impact on other people.

Once Leak moves past self-awareness, he moves on to the question of self-improvement. The problem he sees is that when people want to be the best at everything they do, they usually fail as this is just not sustainable. Instead of always aiming to be the best, he urges people to try to be better than they were the day before. He urges people to look at what they can do to improve rather than placing the blame on other people.

He believes that focusing on self-improvement can offer five distinct benefits: it helps protect against becoming irrelevant, it helps protect against an overgrown ego, it can lead away from envy as it veers away from comparison, it helps prevent people from feeling offended by the criticism of others, and it helps protect people against the highs and the lows of the journey.

Moving on from the self to others, Leak next urges people to consider what credit they can give away to other people. He does not believe that anybody is self-made. Everyone has relied on others throughout their journey to get to where they are. He gives numerous examples of people, including Thomas Edison, who have gotten credit for inventions that they did not develop on their own. The problem he sees, though, goes beyond people taking credit for what is not theirs. In his coaching career, he constantly sees people who feel unseen or unvalued. Therefore, he believes people need to focus on who they can help share success with. Otherwise, both personal and our professional relationships can break down and suffer.

He urges people to adopt the following perspective: “I don’t need to be that impressive. I don’t need to be hailed, esteemed, or adored. It is better to share that spotlight with the team or the people in my life who deserve it. Everything I have has an army of support and love behind it.”

While Leak urges people to give as much credit to others as possible, he also wants people to consider what mistakes they can own. This is difficult for many people because it often requires saying, “I am sorry.” He wants people to use the words, “I might be wrong” much more frequently as he believes this forms the basis of intellectual humility. Too often people allow confirmation bias which is looking “for information that supports our views rather than rethinking our position.” By admitting to mistakes, we help to avoid building in others.

The next question Leak considers is what risks a person needs

to take. Part of the problem with considering risks is that people frequently suffer from decision fatigue. People have been asked to undergo so much change due to the pandemic that they suffer from change fatigue. Unfortunately, according to research, most employers overestimate how much change their employees can handle, and change that is forced on people is generally quite unpopular.

This does not mean, however, that change is not sometimes necessary and that taking calculated risks is important. Often companies stay insistent on the ways they do things without even knowing why things are done that way. Often companies that are able to think outside the box are able to thrive. Making no changes can become problematic in itself. He quotes a tweet that says, “if you ignore a problem for long enough, it either goes away or ruins your life.” All options carry risk, those that involve making changes and those that do not. All of this requires a person to become comfortable with failure,

Returning back to interpersonal relationships, Leak next asks his reader to consider whose dreams they should support. He begins his chapter speaking about many of the unsung contributors who help the greats achieve what they do. Leak does not want to just be someone who helps others achieve their dreams; he wants to help others help others achieve their goals. He urges people to stop seeing themselves as the center of everything and instead see that they are part of other people’s circles.

He says, “Our mandate is to discover the dreams of the people closest to us.” He urges people to find out the dreams of those they know in both their personal and their professional lives. He believes, however, that people first need to look to the dreams of those in their inner circle. Once those needs are met, they can look outward and try to meet the needs of others in their spheres. A few ways that people can support others are through their influence, by “exposing them to new opportunities,” and with time.

The question of integrity is the next one Leak approaches. This involves people asking themselves what the right thing to do is. All people, he says, are presented with opportunities whereby they could do the wrong thing without being caught. The problem, however, is that often people can tell when someone is acting without integrity. He says, “the tragedy is that they may have gotten away with their behavior, but deep down people trust them less because they could tell that person was giving the bare minimum. They might not know their colleagues have lost respect for them, but the shift is there.”

The result of lying is a loss of trust. Leak believes that in order to level up in life, the trust of others is crucial. He says, “The basic idea of being a person of integrity is being a person who is whole. What you see is what you get.” He urges people to consider what they would be willing to sacrifice their integrity for. The answer is not always an easy one to determine. One result of acting without integrity is that it becomes necessary for people to look over their shoulder to see if the consequences will catch up with them. He encourages his readers to try to figure out what is right for everyone and to seek out accountability.



## Many people feel like they do not own their time because so much of it is spoken for by other people.”

Time management is something that many people struggle with, and this is the next question Leak considers. He says, “If we don’t take control of our time, someone else will.” Many people feel like they do not own their time because so much of it is spoken for by other people. Leak believes that he can quickly determine the trajectory of a person’s life merely by looking at their schedule. Most people may have some of their time spoken for, but they have control over the time that is available.

Regarding time, he says that people need to start “treating it as the most valuable and limited resource we have.” Other people will not value a person’s time if they do not value it. He urges his reader to act proactively rather than reactively regard their time. The way he recommends doing this is to have people analyze their own calendar from the month before and see what they had on there that did not need to be and what they are missing out on that should be on there. Some important aspects of time management are to make room in one’s schedule for growth and well as to make time for the people who are the most important.

Rest is not always something prized in modern culture, but Leak wants people to consider whether they have to do everything they are doing. He believes rest is crucial for people to thrive. Most people have pressures from their vocations, their parenting, their marriage or romantic relationships, their extended family, their friends, their community, their finances, and their health. Eventually people need to ask themselves whether they can do it all. It is not possible for people to perform at the best level in every aspect of life all the time. One way people can move away from this mindset is to consider where the high standards came from. Everyone, he says, is struggling. Guilt is a serious problem for people who believe they must do it all. Everyone will drop balls now and again. Leak urges people to consider which balls can be dropped without breaking.

In addition to rest, he also asks people to question whether they are enjoying life. Most people are told at some point what will make them happy. Much of this is culturally based. He quotes Stephen R. Covey as saying, “Between stimulus and response lies a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose a response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness.” Leak refers to the research of psychologist, Martin Seligman, who says that there are three dimensions to happiness: the pleasant life which refers to enjoyment, the good life which refers to virtue, and ghd meaningful life which encompasses purpose.

The final question Leak asks the reader is whether anyone knows who they really are. This refers to transparency. It is hard for people to share who they are because there can be real and serious consequences for doing so. He does not believe that people need to tell everyone every aspect of their lives, but he does

believe that everyone needs at least one person with whom they can share who they really are.

Unfortunately, the more power and influence a person has, often the more they have to hide who they really are. He brings up the process of code-switching which refers to when people speak and act differently depending upon the people they are around. Two downfalls of code-switching are loneliness and the danger of implosion that can occur when a person becomes filled with anger and hurt. He encourages people to become a safe space for others and to have their own safe person.

Ryan Leak, as a personal coach and speaker, is invested in helping people move up to the next level in their personal and their professional lives. His book asks questions that will help people move along this journey.

Along with numerous examples he encountered first hand and statistics compiled by experts, he helps his reader along this path. Each chapter ends with a recap as well as with an action point the reader can implement immediately to help along this journey. His simple ideas can lead to significant improvements in the lives of his readers when the questions are carefully considered and the suggestions are implemented.