

THE BIG IDEAS

The 21 Laws
Super quick peek.

Leaders Are Learners
All about +1%.

Foundation of Leadership
Is trust.

Visionary AND Practical
How're you doing here?

The Law of Victory
How's your commitment?

Your Funeral + Sentence
What do they say? Your sentence?

"The higher you want to climb, the more you need leadership. The greater the impact you want to make, the greater your influence needs to be."

~ John C. Maxwell

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

Follow Them and People Will Follow You (10th Anniversary Edition)

BY JOHN C. MAXWELL · THOMAS NELSON © 2007 · 336 PAGES

"Whether you are a follower who is just beginning to discover the impact of leadership or a natural leader who already has followers, you can become a better leader. As you read about the laws, you may recognize that you already practice some of them very effectively. Other laws may expose weaknesses you didn't know you had. Use your review as a learning experience. ...

No matter where you are in the leadership process, know this: the greater the number of laws you learn, the better leader you will become. Each law is like a tool, ready to be picked up and used to help you achieve your dreams and add value to other people. Pick up even one, and you will become a better leader. Learn them all, and people will gladly follow you.

Now, let's open the toolbox together."

~ John C. Maxwell from *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*

[John Maxwell](#) is one of the world's leading authorities on leadership.

He's trained millions (literally) of leaders and has written over 50 (!) books that have sold over 13 million copies—this one alone has sold over 3 million copies. (Check out our Notes on another one of my favorites: [The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth](#).)

As the title of the book suggests, Maxwell walks us through his 21 "irrefutable" laws of leadership—sharing personal stories along with biographical sketches of some of history's greatest leaders to bring the wisdom home. Although no one does all 21 laws well, getting better at any (or all) of them will make us better leaders. (Get the book [here](#).)

I really enjoyed reading this book in preparation for our Leadership 101 class and I'm excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

THE 21 LAWS OF LEADERSHIP

Each of the 21 laws has its own chapter. Let's start with a *super* quick look at each of them and then we'll drill into a few of my favorites:

1. **The Law of the Lid.** There's a lid to your potential; it's determined by your leadership ability. Therefore, expand your leadership capacity and expand your ability to impact the world.
2. **The Law of Influence.** As Maxwell says a number of times throughout the book, "*The true measure of leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less.*"
3. **The Law of Process.** We can't snap our fingers and become great leaders overnight. Maxwell tells us: "*Leadership develops daily, not in a day.*" (We'll talk about this one more.)
4. **The Law of Navigation.** Steering the ship is relatively easy. Leaders chart the course—seeing where they want to go and charting the most effective course to get there.

"Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less."

~ John C. Maxwell

5. **The Law of Addition.** Leaders serve. They focus on creating value for others. It's not so much "What's in it for me?" but "How can I serve?" That's the law of addition.
6. **The Law of Solid Ground.** Maxwell tells us that trust is the foundation of leadership. We must stand on the solid ground of solid character—living with integrity, being trustworthy.
7. **The Law of Respect.** People "*naturally follow leaders stronger than themselves.*" We must cultivate our strength if we want people to respect us and be willing to follow our lead.
8. **The Law of Intuition.** As Emerson says, we must trust ourselves—"*every heart vibrates to that iron string.*" As a mentor of mine once said, "*Trust yourself. Always.*"
9. **The Law of Magnetism.** Who you ARE is who you will attract. Want to attract great people? BE GREAT. That's the law of magnetism.
10. **The Law of Connection.** We must connect with others. Maxwell tells us, "*Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand.*"
11. **The Law of Inner Circle.** Our potential as leaders is determined by those closest to us. Whose in *your* inner circle?
12. **The Law of Empowerment.** You need to be confident enough to give power to others. Trust yourself and trust your team to crush it.
13. **The Law of the Picture.** People will do what they see. We need to create a "picture" of what awesome looks like which inspires people to follow our lead. Embody your ideals.
14. **The Law of Buy-In.** You have a great vision. Fantastic. (And essential.) But know this: People buy into YOU, the leader, before they buy into the vision.
15. **The Law of Victory.** Victory. Leaders are FIERCELY committed to winning. Period. That relentless pursuit of victory is essential. (We'll chat about this more as well.)
16. **The Law of Big Mo.** Mr. Momentum. Is a very close friend of effective leaders. We need to create (and celebrate!) little wins—always remembering that progress is uber-powerful.
17. **The Law of Priorities.** It's not enough to be busy. We need to be effective. Leaders take the time to properly line up their dominoes and focus on what's most important.
18. **The Law of Sacrifice.** The higher you go, the more you need to be willing to give up. Leaders trade-off freedom with responsibility.
19. **The Law of Timing.** As Jim Collins says in *Great By Choice*, not all moments are created equal. Leaders know when to lean in and seize the moment.
20. **The Law of Explosive Growth.** Maxwell tells us about "leader's math"—if you want to multiply your growth, create more LEADERS not followers.
21. **The Law of Legacy.** What do you want people to say at your funeral? Leaders keep this vision firmly in mind and dedicate their lives to its fulfilment. (More on this as well.)

Obviously that was super brief but before we explore a few in more detail, quick inventory: Favorites? Strengths? Weaknesses?

LEADERS ARE LEARNERS

"In a study of ninety leaders from a variety of fields, leadership experts Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus made a discovery about the relationship between growth and leadership: 'It is the capacity to develop and improve their skills that distinguishes leaders from their followers.' Successful leaders are learners. And the learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline and perseverance. The goal each day must be to get a little better, to build on the previous day's progress.

"If I need to be inspired to take steps forward, then I'll attend an event. If I want to improve, then I'll engage in a process and stick with it."

~ John C. Maxwell

The problem is that most people overestimate the importance of events and underestimate the power of process. We want quick fixes. We want the compounding effect that Anne Scheiber received over fifty years, but we want it in fifty minutes.

Don't get me wrong. I appreciate events. They can be effective catalysts. But if you want lasting improvement, if you want power, then rely on process. ...

If I need to be inspired to take steps forward, then I'll attend an event. If I want to improve, then I'll engage in a process and stick with it."

That's from the Law of Process.

The goal? Get a little better today—building on yesterday's progress.

Note: Both aspects are super important. We must strive to get just a little bit better today (1%!!!) AND we want to make sure we secure the gains we've worked so hard to achieve.

Of course, in any path to mastery there will be days when we may slide back a bit, but we want to notice that tendency and do everything in our power to not let old habits sneak back in and reestablish themselves. Remember: *"Leadership is created daily, not in a day."*

We need to tap into the power of [The Compound Effect](#). It's those mundane, unsexy little things done every.single.day that give us [The Slight Edge](#) we're after.

How's *your* commitment to process?

What's one little thing you can do more of that would have a positive impact in your life? And, what's one little thing you'll *stop* doing that will help you optimize your process?

P.S. Yes, of course, we talk about this all the time. Why? Because *leaders are learners*. We know we will never be exonerated from all future work/growth and, stated positively, we're FIRED UP about making life one big +1% optimizing game—celebrating the awesome while having fun getting just a little better. Every day. :)

THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP? TRUST.

"Most high achievers spend time developing their professional skills. They seek to be highly competent. Fewer focus on their character. What are you currently doing to develop your character?"

I recommend that you focus on three main areas: integrity, authenticity, and discipline. To develop your integrity, make a commitment to yourself to be scrupulously honest. Don't shave the truth, don't tell white lies, and don't fudge numbers. Be truthful even when it hurts. To develop authenticity, be yourself with everyone. Don't play politics, role play, or pretend to be anything you're not. To strengthen your discipline, do the right things every day regardless of how you feel."

That's from The Law of Solid Ground.

If we want to be great leaders, we must stand on solid ground and be worthy of trust.

The way to build that trust? Build our character.

The way to build our character? Well, first thing to remember is that the word *character* comes from a Greek word meaning "chisel." We need to chisel away at our imperfections to reveal the latent potential within. (Thank you, [Jim Rohn](#) for that reminder in [Leading an Inspired Life](#).)

Check out our Note on [The Road to Character](#) for some more tips on how to go about cultivating our character. For now, let's reflect on these three recommended areas of focus:

1. **Integrity.** Be scrupulously honest. No tiny (or big) exaggerations, no white lies. The truth. Period.

"Leaders cannot lose trust and continue to influence others. Trust is the foundation of leadership."

~ John C. Maxwell

"Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy."

~ General H. Norman Schwarzkopf

- 2. Authenticity.** Be you. No phoniness. No pretending to be someone you're not. This is the very first quote I ever memorized (as a 16-year-old): *"To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the day the night, that thou canst not then be false to any man."*
- 3. Discipline.** Do what needs to get done whether you feel like it or not. As Eric Greitens advises in *Resilience*, start with your Identity—who you aspire to be—and let that drive your Behavior which will then drive your Feelings rather than letting your feelings drive the show. What must you do today? Let's do it.

How can you +1% in each of those today? Integrity. Authenticity. Discipline.

Remember: Trust is the foundation of leadership. Character is the source of trust. Let's chisel.

GREAT LEADERS ARE VISIONARY *AND* PRACTICAL

"Great leaders always seem to embody two seemingly disparate qualities. They are both highly *visionary* and highly *practical*. Their vision enables them to see beyond the immediate. They can envision what's coming and what must be done. Leaders possess an understanding of how:

Mission provides *purpose*—answering the question, *Why?*

Vision provides *picture*—answering the question, *What?*

Strategy provides a *plan*—answering the question, *How?*

As author Hans Finzel observed, 'Leaders are paid to be dreamers. The higher you go in leadership, the more your work is about the future.'

At the same time, leaders are practical enough to know that vision without action achieves nothing. They make themselves responsible for helping their followers take action."

Great leaders are BOTH visionary *and* practical.

They can see the big picture and get people fired up about that WHILE mapping out the super practical path to make that a reality.

I have always been pretty good at seeing what was possible and creating an inspiring vision. In the first business I started at 24 (nearly 20 years ago now), I could see 1 million youth sports teams using our technology within 5 years (even though no one was really online yet and very smart people told me that was insane). I was also reasonably good at executing a strategy to make that vision a reality but I played too much on the vision side and not enough on the practical side—although we hit our 1 million target in < 5 years, we weren't making money in pursuit of that goal and wound up needing to sell the biz to a company more focused on revenue.

I repeated a similar mistake a couple more times—achieving modest success but not actualizing our potential the way we could have. (Laughing. D'oh.)

Now, I'm ALL about bridging that gap as wisely as possible and, frankly, over-correcting in the direction of hyper-practicality—ruthlessly focusing on creating a really strong, profitable business such that we have the foundational strength to do all the work we aspire to do in the years and decades ahead. (So much more fun. :)

Nassim Taleb refers to this type of anti-fragile balance as his "barbell strategy" in which we're simultaneously super aggressive AND super conservative. Visionary AND practical.

We need to hold the dynamic tension between our ideals and our current reality.

How're *you* doing with that?

Do you tend to lean too far one way or the other? Opportunities for optimization?

P.S. In terms of Purpose/Mission/Strategy/etc., I like to approach it starting with Purpose which leads to Mission which leads to Strategy which drives the Next Target + Domino.

"Life is like a parachute jump; you've got to get it right the first time."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

My current frame (I write/review this daily):

Purpose: We help people OPTIMIZE.

Mission: Change the world. One person at a time. Together.

Strategy: Help people optimize via Wisdom (inside-out) + Community (outside-in). Create the greatest collection of wisdom ever + the most inspiring community of people ever. (The community stuff is coming soon as I type this in 2016. We've been focused on nuts and bolts revenue (practicality!) before leaning in here. Excited.)

Next Target: 10,000 Members. **Next Domino:** ... :)

—> You?

Purpose: _____

Mission: _____

Strategy: _____

Next Target: _____ . **Next Domino:** _____

Let's be super visionary AND super practical anti-fragile leaders.

LEADERSHIP LAW #15: THE LAW OF VICTORY

*"You ask, what is our aim?
I can answer in one word:
Victory."*

~ Winston Churchill

"Have you ever thought about what separates the leaders who achieve victory from those who suffer defeat? What does it take to make a team a winner? It's hard to identify the quality that separates winners from losers. Every leadership situation is different. Every crisis has its own challenges. But I think that victorious leaders have one thing in common: they share an unwillingness to accept defeat. The alternative to winning is totally unacceptable to them. As a result, they figure out what must be done to achieve victory."

The Law of Victory.

Reminds me of our recent Note on Nike-creator [Phil Knight](#)'s memoir *Shoe Dog*. (Recall that Nike is named after the goddess of VICTORY. <— Incredibly cool.)

Knight says this: "So that morning in 1962 I told myself: Let everyone else call your idea crazy . . . just keep going. Don't stop. Don't even think about stopping until you get there, and don't give much thought to where 'there' is. Whatever comes, just don't stop."

That's the precocious, prescient, urgent advice I managed to give myself, out of the blue, and somehow managed to take. Half a century later, I believe it's the best advice—maybe the only advice—any of us should ever give."

Don't stop... Victory... I'm reminded again of my mentor, the former CEO of adidas who replaced me as the CEO of my first biz right when the market crashed in 2000. Rather than going out to raise the next \$10m - \$20m, we found ourselves in a very challenging spot—burning \$500k per month with investors no longer interested in financing our type of startup.

It was almost 20 years ago now, but I can vividly remember him telling me during some VERY (!!!) challenging times: "It's not how you start something. It's how you FINISH it."

With his leadership inspiring me and the team, we finished strong—making some tough decisions, bringing in an investment bank and selling to one of our two competitors—keeping the biz alive and ultimately giving all of our stakeholders a great return.

Of course, there are times to pivot and even "quit" a certain path when it no longer makes sense. But... As leaders we need to remember the Law of Victory as we go from Plan A all the way through the alphabet to bring our vision to life and do what we're here to do.

*"Leaders who practice the
Law of Victory have no Plan
B. That is why they keep
fighting."*

~ John C. Maxwell

Worth pondering: “What is your level of expectation when it comes to succeeding for your organization? How dedicated are you to winning your ‘game’? Are you going to have the Law of Victory in your corner as you fight? Or when times are difficult are you going to throw in the towel? Your answer to that question may determine whether you succeed or fail as a leader and whether your team wins or loses.”

“There comes a certain moment in everyone’s life, a moment for which that person was born. That special opportunity, when he seizes it, will fulfill his mission—a mission for which he is uniquely qualified. In that moment, he finds greatness. It is his finest hour.”

~ Winston Churchill

WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO SAY AT YOUR FUNERAL?

“What do you want people to say at your funeral? That may seem like an odd question, but it may be the most important thing you can ask yourself as a leader. Most people never consider it. And that’s not good, because if they don’t, their lives and leadership can take a direction different from that of their greatest potential impact. If you want your leadership to really have meaning, you need to take into account the Law of Legacy.”

This is the 21st (and final) Law: The Law of Legacy.

What do *you* want people to say at your funeral? (Seriously. What do you hope they will say? Are you clear on that and are you living with integrity to that vision? Maxwell tells us leaders are.)

Another way to get some clarity on our legacy is to tap into Clare Boothe Luce’s wisdom that a great leader is “one sentence.” (See Notes on [Drive](#) for more on this.)

(Maxwell’s: “I want to add value to leaders who will multiply value to others.” Mine: “I want to help people optimize their lives so we can change the world together.”)

What’s YOUR sentence?!

Here’s to dedicating our lives to serving profoundly, leading wisely, and leaving a legacy.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He’s spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.