

THE 10X CEO

Mastering Leadership, Influence, and
High-Stakes Decision-Making

SUCCESS®



If you have a leadership role, you're likely well aware that becoming an effective leader isn't a one-day, one-year or even one-decade process; you'll need to continuously develop your skills to grow your own abilities and support your team. By honing your leadership skills, you'll be able to accomplish more—and so will those around you.

The question is: How can you get started?

Discover what qualities to nurture to become an effective leader, how to unlock strategies to improve your decision-making abilities (plus, how to respond when you make a poor decision) and the path toward transforming your leadership abilities into an executive mindset. Continue to hone your impact as a leader with these strategic tips and recommendations from entrepreneurs and C-suite executives.

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SECTION 1: A DEEP DIVE INTO LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Becoming an effective leader requires consistent, ongoing effort. An important step is gaining a solid understanding of what it takes to be a compelling leader. Explore how you can develop your communication skills to be a better leader and learn how to cultivate key leadership qualities that will help propel your success. Plus, consider real-life, practical examples of what great leaders do differently that you can apply to your situation. Be inspired to grow with the leadership insights in this section.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

According to the 2024 **Global Leadership Development Report** from *Harvard Business Review* across 15 countries, there are four key leadership development objectives that can help leaders be more effective. These include:

- Growing skill sets, including emotional intelligence and communication skills
- Challenging paradigms and exploring new perspectives
- Managing complex problems that include polarities and paradoxes
- Being supportive and maximizing individuals' potential

Great leadership that breeds success is based on things such as vision, emotional intelligence, adaptability and the ability to be a lifelong learner. Think about it: the objectives the report identifies require leaders to self-reflect. We can't widen our skill sets without being self-aware and desiring to pursue growth. We can't challenge existing paradigms or patterns and examine new perspectives without thinking about new ideas. We can't solve complex problems without probing them ourselves. We can't be supportive and recognize potential in the workplace to meet end goals without being intentional about our actions.

Leadership Skills Versus Leadership Qualities

Before looking at how to develop as a leader, it's important to recognize the distinction between leadership skills and leadership qualities.

Leadership skills are abilities such as efficient decision-making, critical thinking and being able to communicate clearly and plan ahead, while **leadership qualities are traits or characteristics of a leader that help them guide teams effectively**. Think of them as "professional virtues" in a sense. Examples of leadership qualities include optimism, perseverance, integrity, confidence and personality.

Even though leadership qualities are more foundational than skills—meaning your skills in the workplace are a reflection of your qualities—the relationship between the two isn't black and white. For instance, becoming a leader who has integrity might mean improving a skill like reflecting on the moral implications of your actions. Developing a quality and developing a skill can sometimes be the same—though not always.

The Importance of Leadership Development

Hard skills and education can only take you so far in your career. Strong leadership qualities like integrity, perseverance, respect and self-awareness deeply impact the work performance of other team members. **When businesses have effective leaders at the helm of departments, productivity and overall employee well-being can improve.**

Essential Qualities for Effective Leadership

Here are some key leadership qualities for success that competent leaders focus on developing in themselves:

- **Empathy:** The most influential team leaders understand and support team members' needs. They have strong emotional intelligence to pinpoint how others are feeling or how their own actions can affect others.
- **Integrity:** Leaders who continuously keep their word, display honesty in the workplace and have a strong moral compass are those that people can rely on over and over again.

- **Perseverance:** Even in the face of difficulties, great leaders continue to move forward—and guide their team in the process.
- **Self-awareness:** Good leaders understand themselves. They know their strengths, their weaknesses and how to put themselves in situations to lean into their naturally honed abilities.

Simple Strategies for Becoming a Better Leader

Regardless of where you are in your leadership journey, you can develop your leadership qualities every day. Growing your character comes from learning from others and putting yourself in situations to grow. Implement these leadership development tips immediately:

SEEK FEEDBACK

Asking for constructive feedback from your boss, peers or the team members you supervise helps you identify areas for growth. These areas give you a starting point so you know which qualities to hone first. From there you can create a plan of action to focus on building those leadership characteristics that will benefit your organization the most.

UNDERSTAND YOURSELF

Journaling and acknowledging your feelings in the moment are simple ways leaders can become more self-aware. Another way is to ask yourself questions about your leadership identity—how you view yourself as a leader. Here are some examples:

- If someone was describing you as a leader, what words would they use first?
- What leadership qualities do you have that are most helpful to your organization?
- How much do you have in common with other leaders at your organization?

INVEST IN CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Leadership training for professionals doesn't have to be a one-size-fits-all approach. If you're looking to learn, you can attend workshops in your area, study leadership books or get advice from mentors.

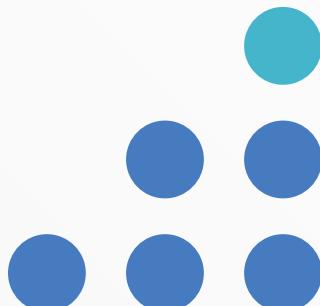


15 Trust-Building Practices for Leaders

Trust is everything, especially if you are leading another person, a team or a company toward a shared goal or mission. Without a credible reputation, your followers may be hesitant, uncomfortable and unsure of whom they're really following. That lack of confidence can crumble the loyalty and united support that's vital in an organization's success.

So how do you become trustworthy? Remember, good intentions are just the beginning. Here are 15 ways to build and strengthen your credibility as a leader, adapted from *Follow Your Conscience* by Frank Sonnenberg, author of *Managing With a Conscience* and *Leadership By Example*.

1. Show people that you care about their needs.
2. A promise should be as binding as a contract.
3. Never sacrifice a long-term relationship for a short-term gain.
4. Don't expect people to look up to you if you look down on them.
5. Give credit where credit is due.
6. The danger of shooting from the hip is hitting yourself in the foot.
7. Take the time to provide the rationale behind your recommendations.
8. Be objective.
9. Stand up for the things that you believe in. (Waffles are for breakfast.)
10. Never ask someone to do something that you're unwilling to do yourself.
11. Your actions must match your words.
12. Think before you open your mouth.
13. You gain more by making others look good than by singing your own praises.
14. Words spoken in confidence are words spoken in trust.
15. Few people will fault you for being tough if you're fair.



6 COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER LEADER

Under the guise of getting things done, leaders don't often take enough time to fine-tune the way they interact with others and convey their messages, either verbally or in writing.

People in general tend to be sensitive to the way they want others to communicate with them, but they are less sensitive to recognizing the ways others want to be communicated with. For example, if Susan, an outgoing and fast-paced person, corners David, an introverted colleague, in the hall for a quick decision on a complicated work plan, chances are he will shut down and not completely receive the message.

Communication is one of the most critical skills effective leaders can develop. In fact, your leadership skills hinge on your ability to communicate effectively with others. Here are six communication skills that will make you a better leader, improve your relationships with other people and boost your team's productivity and morale:

1. KNOW YOURSELF

All good communication starts from a place of self-awareness. When you're communicating with other people, you need to be aware of your inner monologue so you don't end up taking out a bad mood on someone else—assuming the other person can read your mind, being discriminatory, appearing unconfident and so on. It's also important to know what you're hoping to achieve from a given interaction so you can tailor your message accordingly.

2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The best communication arises out of understanding whomever you're speaking to. Knowing your audience's motivations, preferred communication styles, learning styles, etc., allows you to adapt your message and increase the odds of effective communication. Making a personal connection facilitates empathy, puts people at ease and builds trust. Just one caveat: In order to be effective, personal connections need to be genuine, not exploitative.

3. BE DIRECT, SPECIFIC AND CLEAR

Clear-cut communication increases the likelihood that people will comprehend and take action on whatever you're asking from them. It's better to overexplain something than to leave room for misunderstanding.

Whenever you're delivering an assignment or asking for assistance from someone, focus on providing simple, actionable and specific instructions. It's helpful to prepare your thoughts in advance so you include all the relevant details. Don't end a conversation until you're sure the other person understands your objectives and how to achieve them. Deliver these instructions in a friendly, open way so the other person knows they can approach you with follow-up questions.

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6 COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER LEADER

4. PAY ATTENTION TO NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is just as important as what a person says—maybe even more so. Facial expressions, hand gestures, posture and eye contact all play a major role in affirming or undermining your message.

Whenever you're talking with someone, practice being aware of your own body language and the body language of whomever you're speaking to. In particular, pay attention to whether your body language aligns with what you're saying—this will help you be a more trustworthy communicator and can help you seem more self-assured.

5. LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK

One of the best ways to encourage open and honest communication within a group is to model active listening. When someone is speaking to you, really listen to what they're saying. Ask follow-up questions to demonstrate that you're paying attention and to make sure there are no miscommunications. Keep an open mind and focus on thoughtfully responding to what they say instead of knee-jerk reacting to it. This practice builds rapport and understanding between the communicating parties.

6. BE POSITIVE AND RESPECTFUL

Prioritizing transparent, fair and respectful communication within a group is one of the best strategies for cultivating loyalty and boosting team performance. Don't hold your status over other people or use coercion or fear as motivators. Instead, focus on bringing an honest, positive and humble attitude to every situation that arises. Serving as a cheerleader instead of an autocrat helps maintain morale and can even facilitate creativity and effective problem-solving.

Each of these communication skills represents an ongoing practice. You won't master them in a day or even a year. Instead, you'll need to commit to practicing these strategies for life. The more you implement these skills, the more they'll start to feel like second nature—and the more your leadership abilities will benefit.



KEY SOFT SKILLS YOU NEED AS A LEADER

To tap into the needs of employees, soft skills are a must for those in leadership roles. Take a peek at some of the biggest in-demand soft skills:

Attunement

Attunement between a team and a leader is key. It combines active listening and communicating—or literally tuning in to the needs of both the working team and the community at large. During meetings, ask difficult questions, practice active listening and reinforce communication. Creating a culture of acceptance will ensure you receive honest answers. Allowing space for these answers can reveal gaps in understanding you may have about the organization and opens the door to fixing problems.

Resilience

While attunement lies with the collective, resilience comes from within. Many companies falter during periods of change and when they reach maturity. This is where leaders encounter an inflection point—they can renew themselves by changing.

Creativity

Opening lines of communication generates a free flow of information that fuels creativity. Like any other leadership soft skill, creativity can be developed and nurtured—and must be for leaders to create and communicate their vision and for organizations to innovate and thrive. Creativity can come in many forms. Sometimes, it's about looking at something from a new perspective. Effective leaders challenge preconceived ideas and structures, shake up established routines and troubleshoot weak points.

Emotional intelligence

Leaders with well-developed emotional intelligence have the ability to sense, appreciate and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions to facilitate higher levels of collaboration and productivity.

Effective emotional intelligence is the combination of self-awareness (recognizing your own moods and emotions) with self-regulation (the ability to control disruptive emotions) and motivation (an intrinsic desire to effectively accomplish your goals).

Developing this soft skill allows managers to regulate their own moods and behaviors so they have a more favorable impact on others. It also helps leaders recognize and draw out personal conflict within their employees—and help solve the problem by offering empathy and additional resources as needed. Self-awareness is making sure that whatever is bothering you doesn't become a team problem while also helping others recognize and do the same.

Coaching skills

People don't want to be talked at or ordered around. The command-and-control model of management is out of date.

Employee coaching is about facilitating and supporting a person's professional growth, as opposed to giving a directive for a straight line between where they are and what they need to do. This approach requires more skill and finesse than the command-and-control approach. A leader's goal as a coach is to help the team learn, grow and create outcomes independently.

Leaders who are coaches will identify what is preventing people from being effective and give them the tools to teach themselves, instead of just telling them.

Interpersonal skills

A leader with effective interpersonal skills is respectful of employees and easily builds rapport. This leader attempts to see the situation from the other person's perspective, listening actively to understand ideas being presented and empathizing when needed.

Those in leadership who develop this soft skill can help their teams cultivate relationships by encouraging understanding and thoughtfulness. These leaders also show sensitivity to diversity issues, celebrate distinctions and help facilitate relationships among those who may be different.

There is team strength in different points of view, varied approaches to problems and ideas inspired by distinctive life experiences. Interpersonal skills develop relationships that add to the richness and effectiveness of a team.

Appreciation

Think of the best manager you ever had. Chances are they appreciated you. This soft skill is about being others-oriented as opposed to being self-oriented. A leader who appreciates others will take the time to connect with employees, making them feel important, heard, understood and valued.

Appreciating others also involves recognizing employees for their ideas and contributions to the team or the project. If you make a habit of showing appreciation to each person on your team on a monthly or even quarterly basis, you should see a significant shift in employee loyalty and production.

These soft skills for leadership naturally dovetail with each other, but when you aggregate them and practice them, you will be a better manager—and perhaps a better person. It's important to recognize that while some may view these skills as "soft," they are anything but. Strengthening these skills will result in more effectiveness, increased productivity and tangible results from your team. And that goes straight to the bottom line.



3 Leadership Rules That Are Meant to Be Broken

As a leader, it can feel at times like we are trying to navigate in an environment of constantly changing circumstances and landscapes, which can be both disorienting and confusing. As a result, we tend to default to what we have always done, falling back to old leadership rules we observed or were taught long ago.

But following these outdated leadership rules can sabotage your efforts, diminishing employee engagement and trust. Here are three leadership rules that are meant to be broken:

1. FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT

Here's the idea behind this: Act as if you know what you're doing, and show confidence even when unsure. While this can get results early in your career, it's harmful when you're in a leadership position—employees have learned to spot a phony from a mile away. For that reason, trying to fake it as a leader is not likely to work. When you are unsteady or uncertain, it is far better to acknowledge it than trying to pretend. Showing vulnerability and a willingness to ask for help when you need it is a sign of strength that will create loyalty.

2. ONLY RECOGNIZE TOP PERFORMERS

It's been a widely held management dogma for decades that the best way to fuel performance is to visibly recognize and reward the top performers—the idea being that others will be driven to become one. The problem, of course, is that the success of your organization rides on the effort of far more average performers. These average performers work hard, even if they're unable or not ready to produce exceptional results. They deserve to feel valued. If you only recognize top performers without acknowledging the hustle, you are losing loyalty and engagement every day.

3. NEVER BE FRIENDS WITH THE PEOPLE YOU SUPERVISE

Employee engagement is the emotional and mental connection an individual feels with their work. And one of the keys to driving this connection is the relationship an employee has with their direct manager. When employees feel cared about by their managers, they are significantly more likely to be engaged. There should absolutely be some boundaries in the manager–employee relationship, but if you treat your employees more like you treat your friends, the results will quickly demonstrate the value of this approach.



9 THINGS GREAT LEADERS DO DIFFERENTLY

Good leaders do things well. Great leaders teach and inspire others to do things well. If you teach a person to fish, you feed them for a lifetime, right? The same concept applies to successful leadership: It must contain equal amounts doing and holding others accountable.

The best-performing companies have leaders that do and teach, who instill confidence in their team and share their vision with others. These CEOs and executives manage at a macro-level, holding their teams and employees accountable while providing guidance and coaching to help them solve problems on their own.

Here are qualities you'll find in leaders who go beyond good to great:

1. FACE THE FACTS, NO MATTER HOW BRUTAL THEY MAY BE

Bad news is part of business. Great leaders don't just wait for it; they seek it out. Rather than waiting until a task or project is completed, they look for red flags and identify when it's off-track to reach the stated objective. And they don't kill the messenger—when an employee points out underperforming or failing projects, these leaders appreciate the fact that it was brought to their attention. Identifying problems earlier gives them extra time to find solutions and solve problems faster than their competition.

2. TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY SERIOUSLY

Executives want to get regular updates on all projects, whether it's during weekly meetings or through software that facilitates strategy execution. They can hold people accountable to do what they should be doing and completing the tasks on their plate. If goals aren't being met, great leaders take the opportunity to discuss, gather insight and make the adjustments necessary for the individual employees and the company to win.

3. LOOK FOR BRIGHT SPOTS

Great leaders actively look for not just good news, but victories that can be replicated across other departments and teams. It's their job to observe and identify how these victories happened, so the same strategies can be implemented elsewhere in the company for even greater success.

4. DEVELOP AND PRIORITIZE WINNING MOVES

Not every single good idea can be a great idea—one that will provide the best chance of hitting goals. Implementing too many strategies can spread a team too thin and result in things falling through the cracks. Instead, great leaders focus on several key strategies, which they discuss and debate with their executive teams before deciding on which ones will bring the company closer to reaching its goals. Powerful winning moves come from strategic thinking and decision-making, considering all the options and determining which ones will bring the biggest return—year over year, quarter over quarter.

5. SCRAP WHAT'S NOT WORKING

When you have conceptualized a project, product or service from the beginning, nurtured it and worked hard to, well, make it work, it's hard to pull the plug if it's not working. Great leaders must be able to realize when something isn't working—no matter how much time and effort they've put into it. If a new product is eating into the revenue stream, these leaders are able to take a step back and scrap it. If not, the competition will swoop in with a bigger and better product.

6. FOCUS ON THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

It's easy to get distracted by new ideas and strategies. But if a goal is big and bold enough, everyone will feel excited to work toward it. Rather than working on a bunch of smaller, less exciting ideas, a great leader will recognize the strategies that will motivate and inspire their teams.

7. PLAN SUCCESSFUL QUARTERS

Focusing on annual goals is great, but quarterly goals are the ones that get you there, and great leaders know that each week in a quarter is crucial. The best companies focus on having successful weeks so they can achieve the right results at the end of the quarter. Business is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Each leg of the race (or quarter) supports the end goal—helping you reach the finish line in first place.

8. ENCOURAGE CONSISTENCY BUT NOT COMPLACENCY

Getting into a rhythm can help business processes become as regular as breathing, but this doesn't mean you should rest once you get there. When your business is predictable, growth stagnates and success can reach a limit. However, when a business is consistent, great leaders take that opportunity to focus on what's needed to take it to the next level. This discipline of consistency helps executives think outside the box and evaluate what new strategies and calculated risks can help grow the business and achieve greater results.

9. LEAD ADJUSTMENT MEETINGS

Knowing the status of where projects stand is something all leaders must do in order to keep their business moving forward. But "status meetings" lack any means of providing solutions for problems that might have only just started to arise. Instead, great executives focus on leading adjustment meetings where the team can discuss plans that are already or about to get off-track and provide solutions and ideas for improvement.

Companies that are performing well and in the top tier of their industries all have one thing in common—great leadership. CEOs and executives who not only do things right but also inspire those around them to perform at their best can achieve consistent and remarkable growth, quarter after quarter, year after year.



SECTION 2: YOUR GUIDE TO DECISION-MAKING

A key part of being an effective leader is making decisions. Large or small, these decisions can have far-reaching impacts. From the company's key goals and the productivity of teams to the well-being of individual employees and company culture, making good decisions (and knowing how to pivot from less desirable ones) is critical. Use these tips to help you improve your decision-making skills and thrive as a leader.

DO THESE 3 THINGS TO BE BETTER AT DECISION-MAKING

Every day, leaders are faced with a multitude of decisions. Unfortunately, the strategies for making good decisions aren't something all of us are born with—but **the process can be learned and improved over time with practice.**

What does it really mean to decide? Consider its Latin etymology: decide comes from *decidere*, meaning literally “to cut off.” So, to decide can be best understood as the process of “cutting off” any other possibility. That’s why the idea of wavering after you’ve made a decision doesn’t make much sense.

If you want to improve your leadership skills by becoming a better at decision-maker, follow these key steps:

1. CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE AND IDENTIFY YOUR DESIRED OUTCOMES

Gaining clarity on the purpose behind your decision is the first step in the right direction. **Knowing your why energizes your thinking** and encourages you to take purposeful action that leads to results. It also helps you combat procrastination and confront distractions when they arise.

But just knowing your purpose isn’t enough. You must also identify the precise outcomes (the *what*) you desire to achieve. The point of this step is to become laser focused and fuel your motivation to stay the course of the decision.

2. CREATE A SOLID STRATEGY ARMED WITH TACTICS

Now that you’re pumped up, what’s next? There’s no use in clarifying your purpose and identifying your outcomes if you are not prepared to take action toward your goal. You need the elements of both strategy and tactics to execute the next phase of your decision.

To create a strategy, you’ll need to revisit the outcomes you identified in step one. **Each outcome will require a strategy**, which is best understood

as the “big picture approach” you’ll need to follow in order to achieve an outcome. For example, a strategy for increasing sales by 20% this quarter could be incorporating additional new advertising approaches into your weekly goals.

But to get at the heart of execution, you’ll also need some tactics. Tactics are the specific actions you will need to execute to successfully carry out the strategy.

3. TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION

Finally, no plan of action will work unless you do something immediately. Just getting the ball rolling sends a signal to the brain that you are serious and forces you to shift from “mind mode” to full-blown decision mode. It’s far too easy to procrastinate, even when you draw out an intricate plan. Instead of deferring action and talking a good mental game, plan to set yourself up for success by stepping boldly into the arena.

How do you take immediate action after you’ve done all of the above? **Take one strong step that will help you execute the first tactic.**

Are you ready to make a real decision? If so, use these steps to help you achieve your desired outcomes and create new leadership momentum.

How to Separate the Urgent From the Important

When your business means everything to you, it can be hard not to feel like every single task is the most important thing. So how do you determine what's urgent versus what's important? Does the distinction even matter?

In a word: yes. Urgent tasks often have urgent consequences that can be devastating to your business. But if you only deal with the urgent, and not the important, you're missing out on crucial opportunities for long-term growth and development.

If you've ever felt like you spend your whole workday putting out fires, or you're constantly busy but not seeing the professional or organizational results you want, consider these strategies to prioritize your tasks:

TACKLE THE TIME-SENSITIVE STUFF

If a to-do item has a hard deadline that's coming up fast, take care of it before tasks that have a more flexible time frame. Submitting reports, paying bills—get these things done and out of the way before they become a problem.

USE THE EISENHOWER MATRIX

This visual prioritization method, often attributed to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, consists of a box with four quadrants: urgent and important, not urgent and important, urgent and not important, and not urgent and not important. By separating tasks this way, you can start feeling in control of your short- and long-term projects. There's even an app for it!

	Important	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important		This quadrant contains urgent tasks you must respond to immediately.	This quadrant is for tasks related to your long-term goals.
Not Important		This quadrant holds tasks that need to get done, but they don't necessarily need to be done by you.	This quadrant is for distractions and unnecessary tasks.

DELEGATE

This is a big one for folks who feel like they never have a spare moment during the day. Looking for a place to start? Try unloading some of the things that fall into that "urgent and not important" category.

BE PROACTIVE

Unforeseen stumbling blocks and other urgent matters are inevitable—it comes with the territory of entrepreneurship. That's why it's important to be as proactive as possible. Making lists, delegating and keeping a meticulously updated calendar can help you stay on top of the day-to-day stuff, so when unexpected but urgent problems pop up, you're ready to meet them head-on.



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'VE MADE A BAD DECISION

We've all made bad decisions. We're all human, which means we're not immune from making bad calls every once in a while. In a leadership role, however, this can be especially challenging. Although we can't go back in time and change our choice, we can lessen the impact it has. Below, you'll find seven actionable tips for surviving a poor decision and becoming a better leader in the process.

1. Accept Your Emotions

Suppressing your emotions will get you nowhere. It's important to first focus on how you feel.

"The first step is to recognize what happened and how you felt," says psychologist Sal Raichbach, Psy.D. "**Ignoring or pretending leaves the pain open.** If you cut yourself, you wouldn't pretend that it didn't happen or that you don't care. You would deal with it and seek professional help."

If you think it's right for you, consider going to therapy, which can help you work through what happened. You can also journal your emotions or speak with a close confidante.

2. Focus On the Cold, Hard Facts

Once you've recognized and accepted the emotions you have following a poor decision, Benjamin Ritter, Ed.D., founder of LFY Consulting, says **one of the best things you can do is focus on the facts.**

"Take a step out of the emotions and stress to really look at the facts of the situation," he says. "Ask yourself: What is currently happening? What do you really want? How can you work

productively toward that goal given the situation you're in?"

You might struggle to be objective. If that happens, Ritter recommends writing about the situation or getting an outside perspective by talking with a close friend or family member.

3. Don't Let the Bad Decision Consume You

Tristan Gutner, a life and business coach, says **it's important to mentally separate yourself from the decision.** Doing so can help you strip it of its power.

"Once we've made what we'd call a bad decision, we give it a lot of meaning it does not inherently have," Gutner says. "We tell ourselves we're stupid, we can't trust ourselves, this is going to ruin our life/business/relationship/etc."

None of this is true, of course, but Gutner says it can be very difficult to move forward with our lives if we're stuck in that mindset.

"We need to decide, right when the mistake happens, that we're going to learn from it and use it as a momentum-builder to move forward," he says. "If we strip the mistake of the negative meaning

we give it, we can use it as helpful data to move forward and make decisions more aligned with the success we desire.”

4. Forgive Yourself

Don’t be too hard on yourself in the wake of a poor decision.

“The most important step is to **forgive yourself**,” says psychiatrist Dion Metzger, M.D. “We become our own worst enemy with poor decisions. We spend way too much energy wallowing in the guilt rather than using that to go to our next move.”

Use the failure of your bad decision as leverage for going forward. “Mistakes are essential for success,” Metzger says. “You will make them, but what determines your future success is how you respond.”

5. Accept Your Regret

After making a bad judgment call, your mind will likely be flooded with regret. This regret, it turns out, can actually be a powerful tool, Ritter says.

“Regret can help you remember the things you want to avoid in life and actually help you make better decisions,” he says.

Accept your regret and move forward.

6. Try Practicing Gratitude

“We all have regrets,” Raichbach says. “Things we wish we did differently or didn’t say. But those regrets don’t have to control you. You have to learn to control your thoughts to **see the positives instead of the negatives.**”

One way to see the positives, he says, is by practicing gratitude. Each morning, make a list of three or five things you’re grateful for. This will help lessen the grip the regret has on you.

7. Create a Decision-Making Process for the Future

The next time you’re confronted with a big decision, you might feel anxious or stressed that you’ll make another mistake. To counteract this anxiety, consider putting a decision-making process into place for all future calls.

Ana Jovanovic, a psychotherapist, says everyone should **have a process in place for complex decisions**, which she defines as those that have significant consequences and require the analysis of several different factors before being made.

Jovanovic recommends the commonly used seven-step decision-making process. It works like this:

- Identify the decision/problem. Be as clear as possible.
- Collect information that will assist in your decision-making.
- Consider various solutions.
- Weigh the evidence for each potential solution.
- Make your decision.
- Take action on that decision.
- Review the decision once action has been taken.

Armed with this seven-step process, you’ll (hopefully) be able to rest assured knowing that any big calls you make in the future will be well-informed and carefully thought out.

10 WAYS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE MAKE SMART DECISIONS

Our days are filled with a constant stream of decisions—and these decisions quickly multiply when we're in any sort of leadership role. From setting business goals to planning meetings, learning to prioritize and make decisions effectively is essential to succeeding in life and as a leader. Although there are many strategies people use for effective decision-making, what follows are often considered the best of the best.

1. TURN SMALL DECISIONS INTO ROUTINES

Decision-making works like a muscle: As you use it over the course of the day, it can become too exhausted to function effectively. One of the best strategies successful people use to work around their decision fatigue is to eliminate smaller decisions by turning them into routines. Doing so frees up mental resources for more complex decisions.

2. BE DIRECT, SPECIFIC AND CLEAR

There's an old saying: "Don't make permanent decisions based on temporary emotions," and it definitely rings true. Successful people recognize and understand their emotions (including their intensity and impact on behavior) so that they are able to look at decisions as objectively and rationally as possible.

Unfortunately, most people aren't good at managing or even recognizing their emotions. TalentSmart conducted worldwide research with over 500,000 people and found that [only 36%](#) are able to accurately identify emotions as they happen. Strong decision-makers, on the other hand, know that a bad mood can make them lash out or stray from their moral compass just as easily as a good mood can make them overconfident and impulsive.

3. MAKE BIG DECISIONS IN THE MORNING

Another great way to beat decision fatigue is to save small decisions for when decision fatigue is greatest (such as at the end of the day) and tackle complex decisions in the morning, when your mind is fresh. When you're facing a stream of important decisions, a great trick is to wake up early and work on your most complicated tasks before you get hit with distracting minor decisions (phones ringing, emails coming in). A similar strategy is to do some of the smaller things the night before to get a head start on the next day.

4. EVALUATE OPINIONS OBJECTIVELY

When really wrapped up in a decision, successful people weigh their options against a predetermined set of criteria because they know this makes decision-making easier and more effective. Here are some helpful criteria to consider:

- How does this decision benefit me?
- How does it hurt me?
- How does this benefit _____?
- How does it hurt _____?
- Would I regret making this decision?
- Would I regret not making this decision?
- Does this decision reflect my values?

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10 WAYS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE MAKE SMART DECISIONS

5. SLEEP ON DECISIONS

Sleeping on it ensures you have clarity of thought when you approach the issue the next day. It also allows time for emotions to run their course. When you act too quickly, you tend to react, but when you give more focus and time to your decision, you can expose important facets of it that you might have missed before.

6. USE EXERCISE TO RECHARGE

The stress of a major decision naturally produces cortisol, a chemical that triggers the fight-or-flight response. Cortisol can cloud your ability to think clearly and rationally. When you find yourself stressing about a decision, try exercising. As little as 30 minutes is all it takes to get a good endorphin-fueled buzz to return to mental clarity.

7. SEEK OUTSIDE COUNSEL

When approaching a decision, we have a natural tendency to pick an alternative and then gather information to support that decision, instead of gathering information and then choosing a side (this is called confirmation bias). A great way to beat confirmation bias is to seek outside opinions and advice from people who bring different perspectives to your situation. Their perspectives help you weigh your options more objectively and spot your subjective or irrational tendencies.

8. DON'T WAIT TOO LONG

Successful people know the importance of gathering as much information as they can, but at the same time, they make certain not to fall prey to analysis paralysis. Instead of waiting for the stars to align, successful people know that they need to have a timetable to follow in reaching their decision. Once they set that date, they are motivated to do their homework and some soul-searching in order to meet that deadline.

9. ALWAYS RETURN TO A MORAL COMPASS

Successful people know the importance of sticking to their morals when making an important decision. Morals serve as trusted guides when emotions are pulling you in a different direction.

10. REFLECT ON PREVIOUS DECISIONS

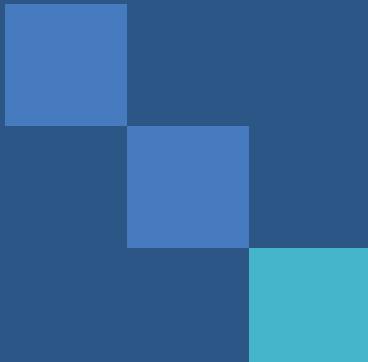
Mark Twain is often attributed with assessing the complicated nature of decision-making as follows: "Good decisions come from experience, but experience comes from making bad decisions." This isn't to say that the only way to become a great decision-maker is to make a ton of mistakes; it just means that it's important to keep past decisions front of mind. Successful people are aware enough of past decisions to use them to their benefit when something similar comes up.

With repercussions that can last days, weeks and even years, making great decisions is an effort that's worth every bit of your time and energy.



SECTION 3: EXECUTIVE MINDSET TRANSFORMATION

When it comes to leadership, having the right mindset is critical. Being able to persevere amid challenges, have resilience in the face of setbacks and reframe problems as opportunities can make a huge difference in our perspectives, goals, actions and achievements. Discover how developing and incorporating an executive mindset can take you to the next level.





LEVEL 5: THE PINNACLE

LEVEL 4: PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

LEVEL 3: PRODUCTION

LEVEL 2: PERMISSION

LEVEL 1: POSITION

HOW TO CLIMB AND CONQUER THE 5 LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

You are a leader. But where are you on your leadership journey, and where do you go from here? That question exists at the heart of so many leaders—everyone wants to know where they stand and how to get to the next level.

John C. Maxwell's *5 Levels of Leadership* can help leaders understand and increase their effectiveness. Read on to identify where you are now, and the steps you must take to work your way up to level 5—the pinnacle of leadership.

LEVEL 1: POSITION

People Follow Because They Have To

The lowest level of leadership—the entry level, if you will—is position. It's the only level that requires no ability or effort to achieve. After all, anyone can be appointed to a position. While nothing is wrong with having a leadership position, everything is wrong with relying only on that position to get people to follow. That's because it only works if you have leverage (such as job security or a paycheck) over your followers. At level 1, people only follow if they believe they have to.

But the news is not all bad at this level. It is a prime place for you to begin investing in your

growth and potential as a leader. Use your time at this level learning to lead yourself—through priorities and self-discipline—and you'll be ready to move to the next level.

LEVEL 2: PERMISSION

People Follow Because They Want To

At this level, people choose to follow the leader. To grow at this level, leaders work on getting to know their people and connecting with them. You can't lead without people, which means you need to learn to like people if you want to lead well. When you like people and treat them as individuals who have value, you begin to develop positive influence with them. Trust grows, which usually leads to respect. Level 2 is where solid, lasting relationships are built that create the foundation for the next level.

LEVEL 3: PRODUCTION

People Follow Because of What You Have Done for the Organization

On this level, leaders who produce results build their influence and credibility. The production level is where leaders can become change agents. Work gets done, morale improves, profits go up, turnover goes down and goals are achieved. The

more you produce, the more you're able to tackle tough problems and face thorny issues. Leading and influencing others becomes fun because when everyone is moving forward together, the team rises to another level of effectiveness.

It's important to note here that the goal with the five levels is not to move away from one level to grow at a new level. Instead, these five levels of leadership build on each other. In other words, level 3 leaders still need to do the things that make level 2 happen. They just add level 3 strategies to the mix. And, as they become effective at level 3, they are ready to layer on the goals of the next levels.

LEVEL 4: PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

People Follow Because of What You Have Done for Them

Your goal at this level is to identify and develop as many leaders as you can by investing in them and helping them grow.

The reason is simple: When there are more leaders, more of the organization's mission can be accomplished. The people you choose to develop may show great potential for leadership, or they may be diamonds in the rough, but the main idea is the same: When you invest in them, you can reproduce yourself.

The more you raise up new leaders, the more you will change the lives of all members of the team.

LEVEL 5: THE PINNACLE

People Follow Because of Who You Are and What You Represent

The highest level of leadership is also the most challenging to attain. It requires longevity as well as intentionality. You simply can't reach level 5 unless you are willing to invest your life into the lives of others for the long haul.

The commitment to becoming a pinnacle leader is sizable, but so are the payoffs. Level 5 leaders develop level 5 organizations. They create opportunities other leaders don't. They create a legacy in what they do. Their leadership gains a

positive reputation. As a result, level 5 leaders often transcend their position, their organization and sometimes their industry.

We all have goals. Many of us want to not only achieve success, but also experience significance. We want to make a difference. The level of leadership you attain is more dependent on your influence than any other factor. You just don't know how many lives you'll touch. All you can do is develop your influence so that when opportunities come, you can make the best of them.

Never doubt the power of one person of influence.



5 Things Successful Leaders Don't Say

How many times have you had a conversation with someone only to learn they interpreted your message differently than you intended? Or found they were hung up on one phrase or word, completely missing the point?

The words you use as a leader, even with no ill intent, have the potential to produce a negative impact on your team. The problem is that you might not even know you're doing it.

Here are five common phrases that can create pushback from your employees:



"There's nothing I can do"

Have you ever called customer service and heard, "I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do." Frustrating, right? This phrase insinuates you are out of ideas. Would you follow someone who was out of ideas? Good leaders are never out of ideas; there are just things they haven't tried yet. You might feel frustrated—like there's nothing you can do at the moment—but if you frequently use this phrase, your team may feel hopeless and pessimistic.

Replace it with: "If I had a magic wand, what else could I do?"

Absolute phrases are dangerous to have in your leadership vernacular. The old adage "never say never" holds true here. When it comes to leading others, remember that people have long memories and these types of absolutes could come back to haunt you. The more ridiculous your absolute comment, the more it will be remembered.

Replace it with: "Usually," "sometimes" or "I haven't experienced that yet."

"Always" and "Never"

"No, because..."

This phrase brands you as a negative leader or, worse, the leader who isn't open to new ideas. If you find yourself consistently thinking or saying, "We can't do that because it's never worked in the past" or "No, because we've always done it this way..." this might be you. Employees have a hard time following a negative leader. If one of your team members offers a new idea, it doesn't take too many "No, because..." comments before they stop coming altogether.

Replace it with: "Yes, we could do that if..."

5 Things Successful Leaders Don't Say

“Does
that make
sense?”

You might be looking for agreement or to ensure clarity by using this phrase, but it insinuates that your employees just don't understand. Not only that, but this kind of phrasing just sounds like a lecture from your parents. One of the quickest ways to close the door of communication is to talk down to someone. Expect to see resistance when you take this approach.

Replace it with: “Do you have any questions for clarification?” or “I'm not sure I'm explaining this correctly. What do you think?”

As leaders, we are often taught to soften a critique by starting with a compliment, such as “I really like your work, but you need to get better at meeting deadlines.” When your employees catch on to you consistently using this one, they start to know there's a “but” coming and they brace for it. In fact, they might completely gloss over your compliment or start to doubt your sincerity.

Replace it with: Any variety of phrases! Mix it up and get rid of the word “but” altogether. You could also consider just letting the compliment stand alone. Not everything has to be a teachable moment.

“But”

Most leaders use these phrases on a daily basis, yet they are usually unaware of their impact. When you become self-aware enough to pick up your own vernacular habits—or even take the time to ask for team feedback on your communication style—you might be surprised at the effect changing a few key phrases can have. A small language tweak can make a large impact.

8 STEPS TO CLIMB YOUR WAY UP TO THE C-SUITE

Many employees dream about climbing the corporate ladder. But most people's career paths look more like a jungle gym according to Suzanne Ogle, president and CEO of Southern Gas Association in Dallas.

"There isn't usually a direct path from an entry-level position to the head of the company," says Ogle. "You'll need to learn lots of different skills, and it will be a long haul. It can take decades to reach a leadership position."

Making it from one level to the next might require a multifaceted approach that includes education, training, networking and volunteering within your company, in addition to playing to the strengths in your personality, Ogle says.

There are myriad steps that experienced executives say will help professionals reach the C-suite. Here is what Ogle and other leaders suggest.

1. DON'T JUST DO YOUR JOB

No matter what job you have, you should look to transform it, says Adam Bryant, senior managing director of The ExCo Group, an executive coaching firm in New York. "Don't just fulfill expectations," he adds. "Build a track record of finding ways to optimize the company and make it more efficient."

2. NETWORK STRATEGICALLY

When Shawn Cumberbatch-Graham moved to Atlanta, she knew she had the tools and the work ethic to further her career, but she wanted to align herself with the right people. She had grown up in New York's inner city and was proud of her "grind" and determination. "I'd notice the people in the room that everyone wants to meet," says Cumberbatch-Graham, executive vice president and chief administrative officer of the Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs. "I knew from my childhood how important it is to know who to stay away from and who to get to be friends with." Networking isn't just about showing up, she adds, although being visible is important: "It's about reciprocity. I ask people for advice, but I also ask them what I can do for them."

3. FIND A GOOD MENTOR OR MENTORS

Mentors and coaches are extremely important to career success, Bryant says. "It's human nature to have blind spots about yourself, so you need someone to stop the conversation. For example, you may think of yourself as collaborative, but you need to know that others [may] see you as dictatorial."

4. BE OBSERVANT

Cumberbatch-Graham consistently observes businesspeople and other leaders she admires so she can learn from them and identify the characteristics that make them successful. "I'd even watch people's body language and listen to how they communicate with other people," she says. "Now, I work hard to pass on my skills and knowledge by mentoring other people."

5. NURTURE YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

One trait shared by the more than 1,000 senior leaders Bryant interviewed throughout his career is good communication skills. "CEOs must be able to simplify complexity," Bryant says. "A leader needs to be able to stand up in front of a group and answer their questions the way parents answer kids in the back seat. They want to know where you're going and how you're going to get there." Bryant recommends practicing distilling complex topics into simpler answers by taking a seven-page memo and turning it into a one-page memo or by cutting a presentation deck in half.

6. BROADEN YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE

Another trait that leaders share is making the most of whatever path they're on, Bryant says. "Think of your life like a towel soaking up water and then taking that towel and wringing out every drop of your own experience," Bryant says. "Good leaders are constantly observing and processing lessons everywhere around them." Volunteer for committees and special projects within your company to learn and build relationships with colleagues and mentors, Bryant suggests.

7. LEARN CONTINUOUSLY

Cumberbatch-Graham encourages people to pursue an MBA, which is "phenomenal" for opening doors and learning beyond book knowledge. But she says all kinds of education and experience can lead to the C-suite: "Keep learning through reading and listening to others. This is especially important today with technology changing our lives and businesses so quickly."

8. BE OBSERVANT

While it may be tempting to focus entirely on your career and your personal life, Ogle and Cumberbatch-Graham both recommend getting involved in your community. Cumberbatch-Graham, who has held several nonprofit board positions and served a two-year term on the City of Atlanta Small Business Advisory Council, says volunteer work is a great way to expand your network and learn from other volunteers. "I feel an obligation to help others in my community, and I enjoy mentoring people," she says. "People are often surprised when I answer their messages on LinkedIn or serve people at the Salvation Army, but I want to help them as much as my mentors helped me."

WHAT COMPANIES REALLY WANT IN A C-SUITE LEADER

Nobody could have predicted today's C-suite leaders would need to know how to navigate things like artificial intelligence, a volatile economy and global unrest. Given the unpredictable nature of the future unknowns, hiring teams have a unique challenge and an opportunity: finding leaders with timeless strengths.

"What do we do in this world where the skills and the characteristics and the traits and the experiences we need to hire for are unclear because the future is not yet manifested?" asks Laura Gassner Otting, a bestselling author (*Limitless* and *Wonderhell*) who has spent decades consulting with executives from the corner office to the Oval Office, including with teams hiring C-suite leaders. "Do they have transferable skills, and do they also have translatable skills—something they've done in one place that can be applied to others?"

In May 2022, Gassner Otting published [results from a survey of around 5,600 respondents](#), finding that "workers are not failing leaders; leaders are failing workers." Only around 36% of workers reported serving under a leader who inspires them.

The traits leaders need have changed in recent decades. *Harvard Business Review* reports that, from 2000 to 2017, companies valued C-suite executives who could manage financial and operational resources. Now, it's all about strong social skills.

Gassner Otting shares the secret and not-so-secret traits companies are looking for in C-suite leaders.

Commitment to a Greater Cause

Veterans, former Peace Corps members and others who have served a greater cause beyond themselves are uniquely positioned for C-suite leadership, Gassner Otting says. "Country first or platoon first [is] in their bones, in their training," she says. "They tend to de-emphasize their successes and skills in the interview process."

Her survey concluded that veterans, compared with nonveterans, are:

- 18.3% more likely to be the best version of themselves at work
- 16% more likely to feel they effect change
- 12.5% more likely to work for a company that aligns with their personal mission

They also tend to be great at understanding the parts of the whole mission. "It's not just me—I'm part of this team, and this team is part of a larger body," she says of veterans, which translates to better culture building in the organization.

An Athlete's Drive

Gassner Otting worked with the former CEO of Citizens Bank, Larry Fish, who "basically he said, 'Don't bring anybody who wasn't a college athlete.'" Why? They do the work in the dark when nobody is watching, she says. In addition, they are able to perform in high-stakes moments; "I realized he wasn't necessarily wrong," she says.

"He wanted people who were willing to work hard until they got it right. He wanted people who would not be afraid to learn and master new skills. He wanted people who were competitive in a way that they were never quite satisfied with the status quo," she says, referencing athletes who beat their personal record but still want to improve. "They're always digging to the next gear..." and they get comfortable with delayed gratification.

A Hunger for the Mission's Success

In interviews, a key question is why the candidate wants to work there. It's a chance for them to show their hunger, Gassner Otting explains. "What is it about this product, this company, this brand that's interesting to them—and listening to them tell a story, [such as if] their grandfather worked for the company," she says.

Gassner Otting says that her research found that more than two-thirds of millennials would happily work harder and longer if what they did mattered more, and around 92% of them said they do better work when they can see how the quality of their work matters to the “big picture.” So, finding those with a hunger and passion for the company’s mission works.

Weight and Seriousness

Along with hunger for the mission comes weight or a seriousness around their goals, she says. “How serious are they? Can you put them in front of your most important client?” Those personally connected to the mission might have more weight.

Gassner Otting points to comments from University of South Carolina women’s basketball coach Dawn Staley, who reinforced the importance of parental respect. “If they respect their parents, [they’ll] respect us,” Staley said in an April press conference. “If they don’t respect their parents, we don’t have a shot.”

Gassner Otting notes the significance of that thought process. “That’s weight,” she says. “That’s seriousness right there.”

Grit, Speed and Tenacity Through the Tough Parts

C-suite leaders have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, Gassner Otting shares. She once

worked with a leader of a maximum security prison who she uses as an example of someone who knows how to put challenges in perspective. When she told him there was an emergency, he asked if anyone had a weapon, was on the wrong side of the wall or bleeding. She said no. “Then we don’t have an emergency; we don’t even have a ‘situation’... We probably have a problem or maybe even an annoyance.”

She explains that thinking every issue is a 10 when it’s really a 3 is essential to creating perspective as a leader. Asking, “How high-risk is this problem to our relationships?” allows executives to be more strategic.

This level of grit and being able to hang out in the “valley of suck,” as she calls it, is essential.

Additionally, she looks to see how quickly someone is able to bounce back from failure. “[Effective leaders] recognize failure earlier so they’re not stuck in it for a long period of time before they realize that it’s not going to work. They recognize when they’re 10 degrees off before they get to 80 degrees off.”

Underlying each, she adds, is a fundamental ability to communicate and exceptional emotional intelligence—in the end, many employees could use a boss who just listens and cares.





GET TO THE NEXT LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

These days, excellent leaders do far more than issue commands, analyze financial data and give presentations. They connect, motivate and inspire teams. As you've seen, many soft skills are valued—and required—to excel in leadership roles, not to mention courage and strength of character. Making confident yet measured decisions is also a key piece of leadership abilities, and that's a skill that's grown (not innate).

Leverage the strategic recommendations provided throughout this e-book to strengthen and grow your leadership and decision-making abilities and develop into a leader who is well-suited to excel in the C-suite. Become someone who, as Maxwell puts it, is followed because of who you are and what you represent.