

# BECOMING AN EXCEPTIONAL LEADER

SIMPLE STEPS THAT YIELD POWERFUL RESULTS



CURT STOWERS

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# **BECOMING AN EXCEPTIONAL LEADER**

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*Simple Steps That Yield Powerful Results*

By Curt Stowers

[www.f5fp.com](http://www.f5fp.com)

Thank you for taking the time to download a copy of my e-book. Becoming an exceptional leader is NOT an easy task. You have taken a huge step simply by downloading this book. It tells me that (i) you understand the importance of the topic, (ii) that you would like to become an exceptional leader, and (iii) that you know that learning from others is one of the most effective ways to accomplish your goals.

As you review the lessons in the book, please keep one thing in mind at all times:

- You are going to fail repeatedly as you strive to become an exceptional leader

And that is absolutely, positively OK! In spite of the popular opinion, leaders are not born. They are made. They are made through countless interactions with others. They are made from facing challenges that push you to the limit. If you are putting yourself in new situations that stretch you as an individual, you will fail. But you will learn. And through this learning, you will grow in to an exceptional leader.

After you read the book – or now if you would like! – please consider joining my mailing list at [www.f5fp.com/join-our-mailing-list/](http://www.f5fp.com/join-our-mailing-list/)

Finally, thank you very much for sharing a bit of your time with me to read this book. I had a very wise boss once that said “time is the most important thing you can give”. I appreciate yours and look forward to hearing from you about your journey to become an exceptional leader.

Curt

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## Introduction

You are faced with a seemingly impossible business plan, you are short handed and there's no approval to hire, your team is frustrated, and you are not getting any help from your manager or anyone else in the organization. To top it off, you haven't been able to exercise, your diet's all screwed up, and you don't have as much time to spend with your family as you would like.

Sound familiar?

I'm guessing it does based on 20 years of working within large organizations. But it doesn't have to be this way. I know. I've been there and have learned – the hard way – that there are a number of simple steps you can take to alleviate the pain. The lessons have been learned through reading, observing others, formal training, and personal experience. The steps that I'm sharing with you are intuitive and easy to implement. In addition, they can be used singularly or as an entire development framework. The choice is yours. If you want to take them on all at once, I say go for it!!! You'll likely fail on many of the actions the first time; however, the second time you try, you'll do better. By the third, you'll have mastered the technique. Don't let the fear of failure stand in your way!!! A note on the format of the guide: for each of the thirty concepts, I start with a proposition that may seem a bit non-traditional. Remember insanity? You know, doing the same thing and expecting different results? You better hope that the propositions are a bit different otherwise you're not likely to get any results. Each section then includes a brief story that highlights the point. That's followed by a rule. These 30 rules provide the framework to leadership improvement. Finally, for each concept, there's an action item for you to undertake if you want to work on the particular concept. The actions are straight forward and will not take a significant amount of your time.

Finally, to those that may be wondering if a book on leadership with 30 concepts and less than 100 pages is worthwhile. It is. I've been through the degree mill and have a BS, MS, and PhD to show for it. I've read the texts, studied the books, and analyzed the theories. People make things too darn complicated. This work draws on literally 1000's of hours of study and experience. It provides the foundational elements that are easily implemented. And they're packaged in a clear, concise, and actionable format. Neither you nor I have time to waste on theory. We're leaders and we take action. Thank you very much for taking the time to read what follows. A very wise person once told me that "time is the most valuable thing we can give". And I truly appreciate you spending the time to use the information that follows to become a better leader.

## Step 1 - Discipline or Regret.

"We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret and disappointment."  
-Jim Rohn

One of my favorite quotes is from Jim Rohn and states "We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret". If you're going to become a better leader, you had darn well better adopt the discipline versus the regret side of the equation!

While there's some that would argue that leaders are born and not made, I do not agree. Leaders are made through experience, hard work, and determination. The first step of your journey to becoming a better leader is to set aside

time to develop.

### Rule #1 – You must make a focused effort to improve as a leader.

That's fine you say, but what do I do that. Simple. You take the time to review the subsequent 29 lessons in this book, identify which items are most relevant, set appropriate SMART goals (more on this in step 6), and spend the first 30 minutes of each day reviewing your leadership goals.

The actual review needs to have two parts. The first part is to go back through your calendar from the previous day. Review the day's activities in light of your leadership goals. Where did you succeed? Where did you fail? What do you need to do more of? What do you need to do less of? Each day you receive an incredible amount of feedback on your leadership skills. The problem is you're likely not using this feedback to change and improve your behaviors. The second part is to go through your calendar for today. What opportunities will you have to work on your leadership goals? Where are you likely going to struggle? What are you going to do different than normal when you face those situations where you struggle? Planning ahead with an emphasis on when, where, and how you will need to focus on your leadership skills is critical.

That's it. No more. No less. Through the wonders of the brain, if you start each day with a review of your aspirations that combines your previous day's performance and your current days plan, you will change your behaviors.

Why do I believe this? Because I've done it! Back when I had just started out working for Caterpillar, I had a boss call me in to his office. The dialogue went something like this:

Boss: "I wanted to let you know that two people have stopped by this week to let me know you're doing a great job"

Me: "Great. I try to do my best. Gotta get back to work now"



Boss: "Hang on a second. They also mentioned that you're really focused and it took a while to get to know you. They mentioned that you're not only a good worker but a nice person and they enjoyed getting to know you"

Me: "I like to get things done, so I'm not surprised they recognized my focus"

Boss: "Well, that's good, but you need to spend more time getting to know them"

Me: "Boss, I'm here to do a job. While I like a lot of the folks here, getting to know them is not high on my list"

Boss: "Well it's something you need to work on to be more successful"

Me: "Boss. You just told me I'm doing a great job and that they like me. I think my method's working pretty well"

Boss: "How many projects are you working on?"

Me: "Oh, 10 or 12"

Boss: "How many are going well"

Me: "6 or 7"

Boss: "Well, for the one's that aren't going well, what do those folks think of you?"

Me: "They're probably not big fans. But that's OK; those projects are next on my list. They'll be pleased enough shortly"

Boss: "You really need to work on this"

Me: "Look, I don't agree with you, but I do respect your opinion. So I'll work on it"

Ah, the joys of youth and inexperience! I went home, called my Dad, and asked for his opinion. He suggested that I pick up Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* book. I did so, read it, made a summary of the key points and reported back to my boss that I was going to give it a go. Of course, I knew that this was a pointless exercise. Every day for three years I started my day with a review of those key points. And by the end of the three years, I knew my boss was right. And I'd totally reshaped my behaviors.

Remember, every day starts with a 30 minute review of your leadership aspirations. Follow this one rule and I guarantee you'll be a better leader in 90 days.

**ACTION ITEM 1 – Block 30 minutes every morning to review your leadership aspirations.**

## Step 2 - Mr. Green Ball



So back in 2003 I spent over a year carrying around a green racket ball with me everywhere I went. Amazing isn't it? You're reading a book on how to become a better leader and the author is recommending carrying around a bouncy ball? Tell your friends that you paid for this tip, and they'll definitely think you're crazy! Or will they...

In 2003 I had a chance to attend a training program called "Making Great Leaders". There're lots of programs out there, but I feel that this one is solid and can really help you to improve. Of course, at the time, I knew there was not a lot to improve in my leadership. The way the course is set up you get feedback from your boss, your peers, and your subordinates in a number of different areas. This feedback is aggregated, summarized, and categorized according to a leadership model. You then meet with trained consultants that explain the results to you and help you to develop a leadership development plan. My plan was rather large.

At the top of the list was my tendency to be a bit too directive and a desire to want to be involved in everything. Mr. Micromanager. No doubt you are shocked that a trained engineer would be in to micromanagement. By this point in time I had come to accept that when shortcomings were identified, they were likely spot on; and, accordingly, I needed to take whatever steps were necessary to address them.

So here's what I did. First, I pulled together a summary of the training for my team. I shared with them the leadership model and explained the various aspects of a good leader. Next, I shared how I scored on the various dimensions of leadership and thanked them profusely for their feedback.

Remember, the feedback I'd gotten was much less than ideal, and it was quite a humbling experience to share the results with them openly. The biggest shortcoming was my desire to always want to "carry the ball" and a failure to hand the ball off to any of them. I let them know that this would stop immediately. And to reinforce the point, I gave each one of them and me a racket ball.

They were given instructions to keep the racket ball on their desk. Whenever I showed up in their work area and started to micromanage they were given full permission to throw the ball at me. At the same time, I was required to carry "Mr. Green Ball" with me everywhere I went while at work.

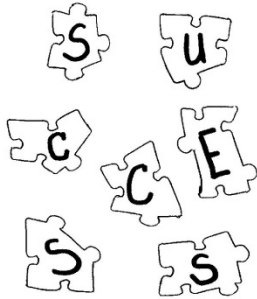
### **Rule #2 - Let everyone know what your weaknesses are and make sure they are aware you are working on improving them**

By this one simple gesture, I made sure that my weaknesses were on full display. Further, Mr. Green Ball served as a continual reminder of my shortcomings and my need to improve. I'm happy to say that I never actually had one of my team throw their ball at me. Although they did reach for it on occasion. I'm also happy to report that when I took the survey several years later, my results were markedly different and markedly improved.

Remember that others want you to improve and are more than willing to help you do so if they know you are serious. Let them know that you want and need their support.

**ACTION ITEM 2 - Schedule a one hour meeting with your team to discuss your goal to be a better leader and ask for their help and support in the process. Repeat this process at minimum on a quarterly basis.**

## Step 3 - It's Not About You



So we started with focusing on your ideal state and then moved on to making sure everyone was aware that you were about to embark upon a journey. Time for a 180.

WIIFM. What's In It For Me? This one simple question is at the heart of becoming a successful leader. While the first two steps focused on getting you up and running, step three is all about how you and your actions are perceived by others. But more than that, step three is all about how you actually feel and act towards others. Are you simply using them to get what you want? Or are you

truly bought in to Steven Covey's abundance mentality and looking for ways to help them be more successful at all times?

### **Rule #3 - Your primary job is to make sure that everyone on your team is more successful**

This one's a lot tougher for those of us who grew up in Western cultures versus Eastern. In the West we see an emphasis on the individual. In the East, the focus is on the broader society. Leaders build culture through behaviors. And focusing on the group versus themselves is critical to their success. There's a huge bit of irony in this particular point: through focusing on your team versus yourself, you'll achieve higher degrees of success.

For many this requires a change in mindset. In the West, it's all about winning and coming out on top. You can see it / hear it every day: "There's no second place, just the first loser." This kind of thinking is pervasive and is often ingrained from a very early age. Now mind you, I'm not a big fan of "finisher medals" and the cult of "everyone is a winner". However, focusing on "taking care of #1" and leaving bodies in your wake is simply not sustainable. Again, there's an irony in what we learn from our parents. Would a good father/mother ever pursue a path that put their family at risk for their own personal betterment? And yet, often they teach a win at all cost mentality. This behavior is the antithesis of a leader. The leader makes sure that he brings the team along and that they all share in the success.

**ACTION ITEM 3 - Make a commitment to each of your staff members on how you will help them achieve their most important goal. Make sure they are aware of the commitment and that you follow through with your commitment.**

## Step 4 - Get Over Being Their Friend



Leadership is not a popularity contest. It's about making the tough choices. If a leader is seen as favoring particular team members, it will lead to the appearance that he/she is not objective and is allowing personal bias to sway his/her decisions. This introduces a dysfunction from which it is impossible to recover.

In David McClelland and David Burnham's HBR paper "Power is the Great Motivator" they highlight three distinct management styles:

**Affiliative Managers** – Leaders of this type are characterized by (i) a high degree of inhibitions and (ii) a desire to be liked more than a desire to possess power. Think of your leader who doesn't like to make decisions and wants to be popular.

**Personal Power Managers** – Leaders of this type are characterized by (i) a low degree of inhibitions and (ii) a desire to possess power more than to be liked. Think of the leader who wants to be in control and has no qualms of doing whatever is necessary.

**Institutional Managers** – Leaders of this type are characterized by (i) a high degree of inhibitions and (ii) a desire to possess power more than to be liked. Think of the leader who gets results but does so while treating all those around him/her with respect.

Your goal is to become an institutional manager. It's this characteristic of a desire for results over friendship combined with a proper degree of restraint and inhibitions that characterizes a great leader

**Rule #4 – You're not your staff's best friend. That doesn't mean you don't support and care about them. It simply means that you have a role to teach and lead and that requires a certain degree of separation.**

**ACTION ITEM 4 – Find the time to read McClelland and Burnham's HBR article. Prepare a summary and schedule an hour with your staff to go over the concepts. Make sure they understand that while you're on a quest to be a better leader and you'll be looking to help them in the process, you'll still be holding yourself – and them – accountable.**

## Step 5 - Quit Hoarding Information!



We've all heard it before: knowledge is power.

Unfortunately too many leaders let their fear of losing control dominate their behaviors; and, accordingly, hoard the vast majority of all of the information they obtain.

- This is wrong on so many levels:
  - It sets the leader up as a bottleneck. Any first year business student knows what you do to bottlenecks...
  - It's a passive aggressive behavior that pisses off your team. You're not too busy to communicate. In fact, it should be one of your top priorities.
- It sends a message to your team that you do not trust them. They're the ones who are ultimately going to be responsible for implementing the strategy and ensuring that the results materialize. Does it really make sense to delay the flow of information to them?

The naysayers are likely going to chime in here with two major objections:

The first objection is normally, "I can barely get all of my tasks done now". There's no way I can spend the time to share all that I learn each day. Poppycock. First, it is extremely unlikely that you're as organized as you think you are. We'll talk more about that later. However, for the purpose of this topic, make communication the second half hour of the day – remember the first half hour was focusing on your leadership aspirations. Communication will be on that list. Voila! In the second half hour you have already fulfilled one of your major aspirations. Second, your business does not move that fast and there are not that many changes day to day. Period.

Initially this new task is going to seem daunting. Sharing EVERYTHING would seem to be an enormous task. However, if you share all new information as it emerges, there just isn't that much new each day. The reality is that a lot of what we see each day is simply an endless rehashing/thrashing of previous events. Those of you familiar with Steven Covey's work will recognize that this is a classic case of quadrant 1 versus quadrant 2 focus.

The second objection is normally, "Much of this information is confidential and cannot be shared".

Man, it must be nice to be so important! Or could it be that you're just a bit full of yourself when it comes to what really is confidential? Review the past six months for the information that you thought – at the time – was the most confidential / most needed to be kept "close to the vest".

Three questions. First, how long did it take before that information leaked out? Second, when it leaked out, did the world end? Third, wouldn't it have been a lot easier for all involved if you shared the information openly and trusted your team to use the information with discretion?

**Rule #5 - If it's not a personnel issue and it's not explicitly forbidden, share the information with your team.**

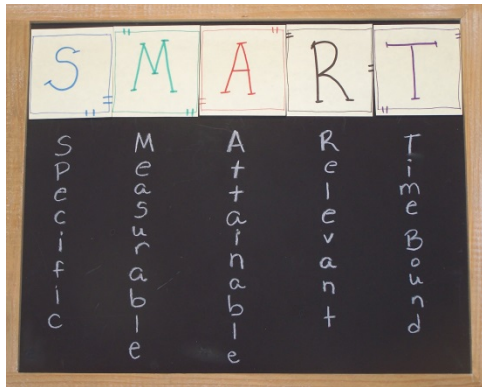
This particular rule has a corollary which is incredibly valuable:

**Corollary 5.1 – The more information you share with your team the more information they will share with you.**

It's the corollary that underscores the real power of this rule. By extending your trust to them, there is a reciprocal behavior on their part. And when your team starts sharing openly with you everything that they know, you're on the path to becoming an exceptional leader.

**ACTION ITEM 5 - The next time you attend a staff meeting, a strategic review meeting, or any sort of "exclusive" meeting take the time to write a brief summary (bullet points are great) of the meeting. Share the summary with your staff and ask them if the information was useful in any manner.**

## Step 6 - Expectations are Expected



Your team knows that you are the boss. And as the boss they are looking for you to establish the rules. So do so by letting them know what your expectations of them are.

Expectations are a wonderful thing.

First, expectations clarify for everyone what is expected to be done. Amazingly some leaders think that their team is composed of mind readers. They expect the team to "know" what is going on in the leaders mind without being told.

They're comfortable that things will just somehow work out for the best as they're a nice person and the team can

handle things on their own. After all, they've been taught that being directive is rarely the right management style. Folks, there's a big difference between establishing the expectations and being directive.

Second, in many cases, the expectations that you establish serve as the aspirations and/or motivations for your team. Clearly defining your expectations normally ensures that you get the desired result. Think about it. How many people want to fail? Further, how many people want to please their boss? Do you think that if you make it clear what is expected, there's a good chance that your team will step forward to the challenge? For the naysayers that bring up the unruly team member stay tuned – step 7 deals with problem children.

### Rule #6 - Establish SMART goals for all of your organization.

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time constrained.

Effective goals contain these key elements:

- Specific - You need to clarify exactly what the expected task is.
- Measurable - There needs to be a quantifiable aspect associated with the goal.
- Attainable - The goal needs to be achievable.
- Relevant - The goal needs to be such that when achieved it will further the broader business objectives.
- Time Constrained - A time aspect must be included in the goal.

Some examples of SMART goals include:

"I will make contact with at least 5 new prospects on a weekly basis for the entirety of 2013"

"I will review my leadership aspirations on a daily basis for the entirety of 2013"

"We will achieve a controllable profit of \$1M for 2013. This will represent a 10% improvement over 2012 profitability measurements. Profitability will be measured from the Key Operating Report that accounting produces on the third accounting day of each month"



Those of you interested in finding out more about SMART goal planning can check out additional information [here](#)

**ACTION ITEM 6 – Draft your SMART goals and share them with your team. Let them know that you expect to see the same from them by the end of next week.**

## Step 7 - Dealing With the Problem Children



Many of the leadership lessons are eerily similar to the lessons you learn as a parent. Such is the case when faced with a problem child.

Our leader in training is out for dinner only to have it spoiled by the monster seated at the next table. The unruly child throws food, cries, complains, is rude, and may even hit or strike his parents. The entire restaurant is aware of the problem child. And yet Mom and Dad repeatedly try one placating action after another to no avail. The leader in training turns to one of his fellow diners and states "If that

was my kid, there's no way in heXX he'd get away with that kind of behavior!"

And yet Monday when the same leader returns to work, they start all over again with the placating actions towards Johnny PITA (that's pain in the aXX to avoid any doubts!) from their own team. And the rest of the team just shakes their head in disgust. They've got their own monster and they won't deal with him. Yes I know the standard objection:

- I'm new to the role and/or Johnny's new to the team. I'll address the issue after I have a chance to more fully observe the situation. It wouldn't be fair to Johnny to take an action too soon.

While Johnny may be a new addition to the team, or the leader may be new to the role of leading Johnny, the reality is he is responsible for ensuring he contributes to the team and is not a disruption. He gets paid to be a leader and avoiding problem children is a dereliction of duty. When everyone in the building knows that Johnny's a problem he needs to be dealt with immediately. And they blame the leader as much, if not more, than they blame Johnny when the issue is not addressed. This particular topic is my number one bugaboo.

**Rule #7 – Address performance issues quickly and completely. Without remediation they will not improve and you will simply face a more difficult challenge in the future.**

Sounds tough? It's not. Two things here. First, the most difficult part of the entire process is the mental anguish that you will put yourself through in preparing for the discussion. You'll turn over the various scenarios in your mind again and again. You'll envision outcomes that have yelling, tears, and perhaps even the need to bring in security. It won't happen. In 20 years of working with people, there has been a grand total of one instance that I encountered where the individual with the performance problem was not aware of the issue. Got that? One time where the person was not ALREADY aware! People know themselves better than we will ever know them. And like the screaming child, they're looking for attention. When you have the "come to Jesus" meeting, it will almost always result in a mutually agreeable action plan. Mind you, you must treat the individual

with respect, dignity, and a high level of professionalism throughout the encounter. However, as soon as the meeting ends, you will feel as if the weight of the world has been lifted from your shoulders. It's done. You were fair and professional. A plan has been established and now it's time to monitor and modify as necessary.

I'm 99.9% certain that you will experience the aforementioned two phenomena. That's because the feelings described come from caring. And if you're all the way to step 6 in the process, you care and you're well on your way to becoming a better leader!

**ACTION ITEM 7 - Sit down with your problem child at work, clarify your expectations, establish an SMART action plan for improvement, identify the consequences of non-compliance, and follow through without exception.**

## Step 8 - Get THEM Promoted



Now the cynic will read this and think "great, this guy's advocating the Peter Principle". Hardly, I'm advocating the Curt principle:

- Team members with the talent to do a bigger or better job need to be promoted as soon as possible.

If you're a great leader, you will attract the top performers. And these performers are destined for bigger and better things. It's your primary job as a leader to develop them in a manner so that they can move on to their next role.

What about the members of your team that aren't looking to move on to bigger and better things? You mean the folks that are the consummate professionals, that show up every day, that keep things running smoothly, that you can always count on to do things properly? Those folks? Don't you think that you owe it to them to get them promoted as well? Huh? I mean promoted as in advertised / put forward for their great efforts – we'll talk more about them in steps 15 and 19.

But back to the great team you have around you...

**Rule #8 - A leader makes sure that every member of his/her team has a development plan that is being fully executed.**

I'm a firm believer that if we are not growing we are dying. Each of us possesses the capacity to do incredible things. None of us will ever accomplish all that we are capable of during our lifetime. As a result, there's always opportunity to grow or improve. Sometimes the opportunity is outside the workplace. That's absolutely fine – there's nothing wrong with a development plan that focuses on a non-work aspect of your life. In fact, we'll discuss in step 13 why a non-work related goal is actually a good thing.

**ACTION ITEM 8 – Schedule time with each of your staff to establish and document their personal development plan.**

## Step 9 - Make the Damn Decision



In step seven we addressed the issue of problem children. In step nine we address those times where you are the problem child. In particular, we point out the obvious: a leader is expected to lead. That means they make the decisions and move! Colin Powell has a great approach to this. His premise is as follows:

- Get to 80% of the solution and then move. A well executed plan will always defeat the perfect plan that is still on the drawing board.

That leads us to rule #9

### **Rule #9 - Establish a firm deadline for all tasks. Stick with the deadline unless it is a matter of life and death.**

This rule is derived from Parkinson's Law (Economist 1955):

- Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.

You see this law in action all the time. How many meetings have you been to where the presentation is still being finalized right up until the meeting starts? How many times have you observed your children put off homework over the weekend until Sunday evening? My guess is too many.

Flip this one around and reflect on the following situation: How many times have you faced a tight deadline and hit it? What was the quality of the output? Did things work out OK? Were you proud of what you accomplished? Were those around you impressed with what you accomplished? Was the customer who received the product happy? My guess is that you answered all of the above in the affirmative. You already know why this rule is so important; you simply need to keep it at the front of your mind.

Leaders who face difficulty with this rule need to look back at the management types that we outlined in step 4. In all likelihood if you are struggling with this rule, it's because you are more concerned about being liked than you are about being in charge. A leader has to make the tough decisions even if they are unpopular. The end result of making tough decisions is threefold. :

- First, you ensure the long term viability of the organization. Paralysis by analysis is deadly. By deciding you are maximizing the probability that the organization will be successful. Even if the decision is wrong, you'll have eliminated the first alternative and moved on to the second, in addition, you'll likely have learned from the process and this learning will make the second attempt go much more quickly. Remember failure is not a bad thing.
- Second, you will have capacity for more things. When you "know" what to do and spend an extra day, week, or month searching for a "better" solution, you are wasting your most

valuable possession: time. Making the decision allows you to focus on the next task at hand.

- Third, and most importantly, you'll gain respect from your team. They expect you to make the decisions. That's why you are in the leader position. When you deliver on this expectation it builds their confidence in you. It lets them know that they are free to fulfill their obligations. It lets them know that you're serious about getting things done. It sets the tone for the organization.

Finally, you will fail. Get over it. We are all human and failure is part of life. However, if you focus on executing solid, well thought out plans, those instances of failure will be few and far between. Conversely, if you can't make up your mind / can't make the decision you are already a failure. Harsh words, but you need to face reality if you are to grow as a leader.

**ACTION ITEM 9 - Pull out your to do list and review each item, quickly writing down the best course of action based on the current fact set. For each action you listed, write down the worst possible result of taking that action. Now write down the likely outcome of taking that action. For any item where the worst possible outcome is not catastrophic and the likely action is acceptable, take the action. For those actions where the result would be catastrophic, establish a firm deadline and stick to it.**

## Step 10 - Take One For the Team

### Take One...



### For Your Team

So you're watching ESPN on Sunday evening and they're interviewing the head coaches:

- Coach 1 - We didn't execute as well as we should have today. That's my fault as I had not anticipated some of the things that the opposition threw at us during the game. While the guys put forth a great effort, we need make sure that we are better prepared to respond to the situations that arise. This week we'll address the issues that surfaced, we'll make sure that we work on the areas where we struggled, and I'm confident that the team will be ready for next week. If they're not that's on me – we've got the right personnel on board for this system and we are going to win a lot of ball games.
- Coach 2 - That was pretty ugly today. Smith threw four interceptions. There's no excuse for that. He can't do that if we want to win. I do recognize that the offensive line wasn't giving him the protection they should have and he was under pressure all day. We'll be looking at changing some lineman if this trend continues. I'll also be having a heart-to-heart with our special teams coach, Coach Jones. That's not acceptable to have the opposition recover an onside kick to start the game. Special teams are only out there for a dozen plays a game and they darn well better perform. I'm starting to wonder if Jones is the right guy for the job. All that said, given all of the personnel changes we made during the off season, this really wasn't that surprising. We've got a lot of new guys who have not yet grasped the system. They'll learn with time and we'll be better by season's end. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got some aXX to chew in the locker room.

Now I'm all about situational leadership and the need to be abundantly blunt on occasion; however, leaders who throw their teams under the bus disgust me. It's their team. They chose them. They are responsible for developing them. They are responsible for the results. They are the ones that get all the credit; and, accordingly, have the obligation of accountability when things go poorly:

### **Rule #10 - Take responsibility for your team's shortcomings and failures.**

On a personal note, this is probably my number one pet peeve. I hate excuses! It drives me crazy to hear anyone – much less a leader – rationalize why things did not work out properly. Accept responsibility for the outcome, clarify the next goal, build the plan, execute it, repeat. Don't waste anyone's time by blaming others and making excuses. It's pointless, it destroys morale, and it shows that you lack the character to be a leader.

Conversely, when your team sees you step forward and accept personal responsibility for the failure, they will respond. You chose them as they were the best. They hate failure. They are used to success. They know how painful it is to be in your situation. They know that they cannot put you in that situation next time. They know that you are protecting them. And they're about to step forward

and make sure that you know your confidence in them is warranted. They're about to deliver on the next task. You may have lost this battle but you just won the war for your team's heart and mind by taking one for the team.

**ACTION ITEM 10 – The next time your team fails defend them like a momma bear would do for her cubs. Let the organization know that the failure was due to you not being a strong enough leader. Commit to resolving the situation in a reasonable time. Then sit down with your team, let them know the commitment you made, and ask them to help you craft the new action plan.**



## Step 11 - It's Their Job Not Yours



Why is it that some leaders manage to get a lot more out of their teams AND seem to spend a lot less time in the process? It's very simple; they understand their role and their team's role. By fulfilling their respective roles, things get done. If, on the other hand, the leader attempts to impose his/her will on the team, things fall apart quickly: nothing drives top performers crazier than a leader who is constantly hovering over them.

I learned this early on in my career at Caterpillar. Way back when I started out as a research analyst I had responsibility for the mathematical models that were embedded in our inventory management systems. I won't bore you with the details, but the key point is that there's the theory – what I was responsible for – and there's the actual implementation – what the IT systems folks are responsible for. I'd done all of my data crunching and identified an improvement. I'd then gone in to a copy of the code, figured out what needed to be done, written the code, and presented the package to my boss with a ribbon wrapped around it. He looked at me and smiled. He said, "Curt this is great, but that's not how we request changes. Just describe what you want done and the IT analyst will make it work." I disagreed, but acquiesced. When I took the change request out to the analyst (Dave), he saw what needed to be done and completed it with no problem. I thanked him. Over time, I came up with more changes and asked Dave for his help and guidance each time. One day I was stuck and couldn't quite figure out how to change the model. I stopped by Dave's desk and let him know what I was trying to do. He listened, let me know he understood, and let me know it was definitely a tough problem. I went on my merry way to my next task of the day and filed this particular idea under the "lost cause" file. Two days later, Dave gave me a shout and asked that I stop by his desk. He paraphrased the problem back to me and suggested an alternative. I said, "Great, can we do it?" His response was "I already have".

Micromanaging introduces a number of dynamics that are destructive and unhealthy:

- It shows your team that you do not trust them.
- It shows you think you are better than your team.
- It gives them permission NOT to do their job as they know you will do it for them.
- It kills any sense of ownership that they have in the process or product.

Read those again. Do you want to behave in a manner that establishes an environment with those factors? I didn't think so. That brings us to rule #11:

**Rule #11 - Micromanaging is the deadliest sin for a manager.**

Turning back to my example, if I'd have told Dave how to do every change, there's no way he would have come up with the clever idea he did. By working with him and letting him do his job, his creativity and ownership grew with each passing day. When we came upon a really challenging problem, he came up with the solution and shared. Micromanaging would have made this dynamic impossible.

**ACTION ITEM 11 - For the next week do not make a single specific request to any of your team members. Instead, each time you need their help, approach them with the following "John, I've got situation 'A' and I was hoping that you could handle it for me". When they attempt to drag you in to micro-management land with a series of question, respond with "I've got confidence that you'll make the right choice. When you come up with the solution, we can sit down and review." Then walk away.**

## Step 12 - You Are a Role Model



In spite of what Charles Barkley may claim, leaders are role models. You're going to be out in front of folks. You're going to be up on the "big stage". And people are going to watch:

- They'll watch your calendar
  - They'll watch the car you drive
  - They'll watch what hobbies you pursue
  - They'll watch how you treat others
- They'll watch when you come to work
  - They'll watch when you leave work
  - They'll watch how you dress
  - They'll watch when, where, and what you eat for lunch
  - They'll watch who you talk to during the day

And with each observation they make, their behaviors will change ever so slightly. Slowly, surely, the persona of the organization will assume the shape of your persona.

### **Rule #12 - Every action a leader takes – in or out of work – shapes his/her team**

The implications of this rule are enormous: with great power, comes great responsibility. When you assume the role of a leader, you are in the spotlight all of the time. Further, as we're all hard wired with a tendency to mimic our leaders, each action you take will have an impact on other. As a result, you need to be constantly aware of what you are doing. The corollary to Rule 12 is:

### **Corollary 12.1 - Consider each of your actions carefully. There may be implications beyond what you are anticipating.**

Those of you familiar with Daniel Goleman's work on Emotional Intelligence will recognize this concept "self awareness". If you're not familiar with Goleman's work, I'd encourage you to pick up the book and give it a read. It's extremely insightful, enormously practical, and easy to focus on the principles that he illustrates.

I got my first major dose of this when I stepped in to my first facility manager position. My prior manager (Mary) pulled me aside and gave me some guidance:

Mary: "Curt, you need to understand that a facility manager is different. Everyone is going to be watching you".

Me: "Yeah, I get it, the facility manager is important"

Mary: "No, you don't understand. Everyone out there will constantly be watching you. Be careful what you do and don't do"

Me: "I understand"

I didn't. However, after the first two weeks on the job, I got it. Folks were talking to me about my car, where I parked, who I spoke with on what shift, what I said in some meeting, and so on and so on. While it seems obvious now, I was absolutely stunned at the time. I had no idea the influence a leader's behavior has on others.

**ACTION ITEM 12 - Replay yesterday in your mind. Think through when you came to work, how you greeted folks, how and where you sat in your meetings, the language you used in your e-mails, what you had for lunch, what you wore, who you called, when you left, where you stopped on your way home, what you learned, whether you exercised, what you had for dinner, etc. Ask yourself if the way you led your day is the way you want your team to lead theirs.**

## Step 13 - Work Life Balance is Critical



You were not able to have as many date nights with the spouse, you didn't get to all of the kids events, you never modified your diet, and that exercise program never quite got off the ground. You vow to do better next year and update "the list" so that January 1 you can hit the ground running. And a year passes. And the cycle repeats itself.

Folks, here's a secret -- ain't anybody going to get out of this life alive. And the corollary to that secret is that at some point in time in the future you will look back on what you accomplished and what you wish you would have done.

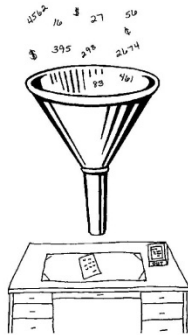
And when you look back, it's very, very unlikely that you're going to think: "Man I sure wish that I would have spent more time working and less time with my friends, family and passions". That brings us to rule 13:

### **Rule #13 - Have at least one passion outside the workplace that you pursue daily.**

Now when it comes to talents related to music, I'm down there in the bottom 1% -- I was one of the kids they would not even let touch an instrument. However, I'm always amazed by the ability of great musicians to deliver a message with their craft. On the topic of work life balance, Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle" illustrates this point better than I ever could...

**ACTION ITEM 13:** Head over to YouTube and search for/listen to [Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle"](#). Now open your calendar. Block time on your calendar for a recurring event every day for your one (or more) passions. Make sure that under NO circumstances do you let anything supersede this item.

## Step 14 - It's About the Money



Cold, hard, fact: Business is about making money. Yes, you should be working in a profession that you enjoy; and, ideally, you should never feel like you have a job.

However, that does not change the fact that **business** is about making a dollar. Some folks think that it is "evil" or in some sense less "noble" if you even mention the topic of dollars. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jacob Needelman in his book *Money and the Meaning of Life* actually comes right out and states that the biggest issue most folks have is that they do not put **enough** importance on money. I could not agree

more...

The key here is that the statement is "importance of money" and not "importance of **more** money".

Go back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. At the base are the physiological (e.g. food), then comes safety (e.g. home). Last time I checked each of these requires money. Further, as you move up the hierarchy to love, esteem, and self-actualization, you must consciously decide on how much importance you place on money versus experiences. Again, money is part of the equation. Most people don't take the time to focus on their relationship with "the almighty dollar" and just let things happen. That's not healthy.

Now change your frame of reference ever so slightly. Put yourself in the position of the CEO or senior manager of your organization. Do you think that he/she is a little bit focused on the bottom line profit number? If not, make sure your resume is up to date as it's only a matter of time until your current ship finds the ocean floor! Remember WIIFM (what's in it for me?) back in step 3? Same thing here. That senior manager wants his/her bottom line results. That's why they're the senior manager of the business – a business that must perform financially to keep the shareholders happy. The easiest way to gain the latitude to pursue your passions and dreams in the workplace is by delivering the results.

### **Rule #14 - You gain freedom by delivering the numbers.**

I actually developed a simple, three step framework that I use with great success again and again:

- Get Your Numbers
- Market Your Numbers
- Keep Your Boss Off Your Back

Some might find step three amusing, but it's critical! Let's take each step in order:

**Get Your Numbers:** Back in step 6 we talked about SMART goals. You absolutely must deliver on your goals if you want the latitude to lead at work. Failure to get the numbers results in poor reviews, a poor reputation, and limited opportunity to have a larger influence.

**Market Your Numbers:** Getting the numbers is not enough. It's simply the price of admission. You will not have the opportunity for larger influence unless the organization knows you can and do deliver. You must take the requisite time to ensure that the organization recognizes your contributions. While you don't need to be obnoxious/overbearing on this topic, you had darn well better make sure that the key decision makers are aware of what you are doing. Network, network, network.

**Keep Your Boss Off Your Back:** You just increased productivity by 37% and told the entire organization about it! Great news right? Wrong. Your boss's number one goal is to improve quality. Guess who's about to climb all over your back? Think about it. You just trumpeted your success to the entire organization and did nothing for his/her primary goal. How's that make him/her look? You had better be darn sure that the numbers you are getting and promoting are aligned with the broader organization's goals.

Now for the purists out there who are shuddering at reading the above three rules, get over it. The reality is many of us do and will work inside an environment where politics exist. I believe that we each should pursue our passions as much as possible. Further, I believe that we all have an obligation to lead to the best of our ability - I'm writing this book to help other achieve that goal. However, I'm also acutely aware that politics exist everywhere. Our job is to find the most efficient way to navigate them that allows us to pursue our passions and help other people in the process. As I share often "I don't make the rules, I simply exploit them". My one boss hated it whenever I said this. She then encouraged me to keep following my framework.

**ACTION ITEM 14:** Get a copy of your boss' SMART goals. Review all of your accomplishments for alignment with his/her objectives. Sit down with him/her and share the findings. During the meeting, ask "What else can I do to make you more successful?"

## Step 15 - Never Compromise



So you've built the best team in the world, given them all of the tools, provided a great environment, and let them know you care. You're done right? WRONG! If you want your team to follow you, to buy in to your vision, to be 100% committed, they have to know that you are willing to fight for them at all costs.

### **Rule #15 - Advocate for your team regardless of the impact to you**

It would be a wonderful world if everything went smoothly all of the time. Alas, we do not live on Lake Wobegon. We live in a world where change is constant, challenges are never ending, and there is always more to do than time available. Ultimately we end up in situations where decisions must be made. We live in a world where tradeoffs are factored in. So we barter, horse trade, and make deals. That's reality and everyone knows it.

However, HOW and WHAT you trade off is critical. Each of your team has his/her special beliefs and/or those things that are deeply personal to them. Ironically, it is often not something that you consider "big" that is most important to them. However, to them it is huge. It could be the old chair that they love, the need to leave at 2:00 on Monday to attend to some personal task, or the desire to host the annual Christmas party. While these don't seem "big", they are often enormous:

- The old chair may be critical as it's the only one that is comfortable and gives them relief from their chronic back pain.
- The early departure may be to help at the local shelter for homeless families.
- The desire to host the Christmas party may be because they don't have any close family and this is their personal Holiday celebration.

What seems inconsequential to you is actually critical in their life. And in each of the above cases you'll have to make decision on whether or not you bend when the powers that be identify "must do". Perhaps it's an edict to switch everyone to the new furniture, a mandatory meeting, or someone else's Christmas party on the same day. You have to decide where you'll advocate. And it had better be on behalf of your team.

Now by design, I chose examples that are ancillary to "normal" work. That's for two reasons. First, when it comes to work issues, alignment is often high, our team delivers great results, and it's easy to advocate for them. They have a track record of success and you sticking your neck out for them is not really risky at all. In fact, others "know" your team's reputation and will often acquiesce easily. Hence, advocacy in these situations is easy and rarely puts you at any personal risk. You need to advocate in this manner; however, this type of advocacy is relatively easy and you're really fighting for the corporate objective versus them personally. Second, contrary to popular opinion, there's more to life than work. It's these non-work activities and interests that are often the most critical to



your team. And, accordingly, they must be the most critical to you. Further, it's exactly these strange or abnormal requests that put you at the most risk professionally. There is NOT any apparent visible benefit to you or the organization by advocating. The request is not rational on the surface. And yet the reality is these are the most rational in our team's mind; and, accordingly they are the most important issues for which we must advocate.

I've had the chance to work for a lot of different people over my career. However, one stood out for me in this particular area – Larry Newbanks. I watched repeatedly as Larry would advocate for his team. No matter what the situation, no matter what the cost, he always supported his team. Now sometimes it did not work out so well for him personally. But I guarantee you this. Whenever Larry needed something from me, whenever I had a task to complete, I made darn sure it was done properly. I knew that Larry was going to fight tooth and nail for the cause that I asked him to support. And, for that reason, I wanted to be doubly diligent in all my activities. I knew Larry was my advocate. My voice. And that always caused me to go the extra steps when Larry asked me for anything. His advocacy, his leadership, made me a better person. That lesson has stuck with me over time.

**ACTION ITEM 15 - Sit down with each of your team. Ask them to identify their one biggest work goal and one biggest personal goal where they need your help. Do everything in your power to make sure they get the required support.**

## Step 16 - The Feedback Loop



Technology makes massive gains with each passing day. One of these gains is the ability to "fly by wire" versus via a mechanical system. The expression comes from the aerospace industry where technology has evolved to the point where the manual flight controls can be replaced by a series of electronic controls. No longer is there a direct mechanical linkage to the planes control surfaces. Instead an electronic signal is passed to servo motors that control the surfaces. Great, right? Not so fast. Without the tactile feedback, pilots used to flying with the mechanical controls were lost! They had no sense of feel; and, accordingly,

found flying the plane to be incredibly more difficult. As time has progressed a combination of artificial/simulated feedback and other feedback mechanisms (gauges, indicators, etc.) has created a system that now works great.

Take a second example. Your kid's PS3. When you pick up a controller and start playing a game one of the first things you notice is that you will get feedback via shaking in the controller. The same is true with the high end "driving simulators" that can be tied in to the PS3. The designers have built in feedback to let the players know when things are off track.

And yet many leaders at work never take the time to sit down with their team and give them any sort of feedback.

No matter how good you and your team are, there is no way that you will succeed long term unless you have alignment of goals and efforts. And the only way to ensure alignment is to review the goals and efforts.

### Rule #16 - Quarterly reviews are mandatory

Many folks shirk when I suggest this. They roll their eyes, sigh, and state with a great deal of conviction that "I don't have time enough for the annual reviews, much less the quarterly reviews".

Great, so unlike any other aspect of our life, you're going to trust that without any feedback outside of what is likely a cursory 1/2 hour discussion once a year things are just going to work out fine? Oh, and with this one statement you've just acknowledged that you don't have an hour of committed time to give to each of your team on a quarterly basis. And did I mention that you also just told them that you don't want to give them their opportunity for "show and tell" this quarter? Think back to grade school. How'd it feel when you did not get to attend show and tell all year while other kids got to share repeatedly?

Hopefully you're convinced after reading the above that quarterly reviews are critical to your team's success. The key is that not only are they critical, but they are also easy to conduct. There is one disclaimer here -- like any habit they are difficult to start!

As with most things, it's all about the process. My recommendation is to keep it simple. Here's the process that I follow:

- Establish a schedule. Block time on your respective calendars for the review. This just made it real for the other person. As such they now know they have to deliver. And they will.
- Make sure that you have a copy of their SMART goals (see step 6) when you sit down with the person. The review is about alignment and we darn well better have the reference point.
- Ask them "How are things going" and shut up. They may talk about work, they may talk about hobbies, they may talk about what they did last weekend. They may vent on their biggest frustration. The key is to let them start the conversation. Let them tell you what is important to them.

Eventually things will come around to the discussion of the progress on their goals. I like to use a 1 to 5 rating system as I believe it provides an adequate amount of granularity. It is critical that you provide them with an EXPLICIT written assessment. You owe it to them to let them know how they are doing. And here's the amazing part -- they already know what the rating is BEFORE you tell them. Remember you set the goals, you had the review last quarter, and you have been providing them with feedback quarter after quarter.

I also like to provide a 1 to 5 rating on "behaviors" as well (more on this on step 18). The key point here is that attitude and approach are just as important as getting the goals. Put another way, the ends do NOT justify the means.

Finally, provide them with a written copy of the review for their reference. Oh, and by the way, ignore your local HR representative that tells you that "you can't do that". Yes you can. HR is following the legal department's advice. They're concerned that a lawsuit might arise based on the written document. A lawsuit IS possible -- if you have not been fair, you have not been consistent, and you have not been truthful in the review. If that's the case, you deserve to get your backside in a sling as you're not a very good leader!

The key point here is that we're all hard wired to want and expect feedback. In the absence of such we create all sorts of nightmare scenarios. That's neither healthy nor productive. Further, I can think of no better way than sitting down with your team and having a frank, open, constructive dialog to show that you respect them as individuals and value their contributions. After all time is your most valuable possession and in the process of conducting the reviews you will have just given them the gift of yours.

**ACTION ITEM 16: Schedule and conduct, without fail, quarterly reviews with each of your teammates.**

## Step 17 - You're Not Davy Crockett



American folklore loves to celebrate the rugged individual that blazed trails for all to follow. Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, the young Abraham Lincoln. All these big, rugged, self-sufficient men took on the world single handedly and prevailed. Poppycock. While I don't want to disparage or diminish the efforts of any of these individuals, they each had help and support at every step of their journey.

And if you're going to be a successful leader you had better have a support system as well. The reality is leading is a learned trait, hard – make that impossible! – to master, and requires you to work at it continuously. While you can certainly take a shot at "going it alone" a much better approach is to learn from those around you. The lessons that I'm sharing here come from a number of individuals that I had the privilege of interacting with over the years. In some cases, I never had an explicit discussion with them on the topic. In others, we spoke openly about the topic. But in all cases their help accelerated my learning process exponentially.

### Rule #17 - Identify a Leadership Mentor and Learn From Him/Her

Some of you are probably thinking, "Well that's easy enough to say, but the folks that come to mind would never be willing to mentor me". Again, poppycock. A good leader is always learning. And the most learning comes via teaching. I guarantee you that each and every leader you identify cherishes the opportunity to develop other individuals. Further, asking someone to serve in the mentor role is about the most sincere compliment you can pay them. When you make the request, you are telling that person that you think they are extraordinary, that they possess a special skill that you would love to have. Think about it: if someone came to you and asked you to mentor them in something how would you react? The worst possible case that I can envision is that the person let's you know they would like to but time is very tight and it would be difficult for them to give you the attention you deserve. My guess is the next words out of their mouth will be "But, I know of someone else who might be able to help". If that's NOT their response, turn it around "Do you know of someone else who could help me become a better leader?" And in the hugely unlikely case that none of this works, so what? There's got to be another person around who you can learn from on the topic.

Now there's a corollary here that is critical.

### Corollary 17.1 - As a leader you have a responsibility to mentor others

Too early for you? I doubt it. If you have read this far and are considering even putting 1/4 of these ideas "in play" you're miles ahead of others. Work with your mentee to help them learn and grow. In the process, you'll likely learn more than you can ever imagine. The reality is that once you start

learning about leadership you gain new knowledge each and every day. However, often you don't recognize all that you have learned until you are "forced to explain". When you work with your mentee you'll be required to explain "why"; and, in the process, the knowledge you have learned will move from the subconscious to the conscious. It'll be through sharing that you really take the next step on your leadership journey.

**ACTION ITEM 17: By the end of next week identify and sit down with your leadership mentor.**

## Step 18 - Playing Nice With Others



I have learned a ton of things over my time in the workplace. Perhaps no lesson was more transformational than the importance of "soft skills" versus "hard skills". Always being the solid student and top technician, I entered the workplace believing that my technical skills would hold the keys to my success. Nothing could have been further from the truth. For clarity, let's differentiate between hard and soft skills:

- Hard skills are those technical skills that are required to complete your job. They're the ability of an accountant to understand the income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow statement. They're the ability of the engineer to use a computer aided design package as well as an HP 12C. They're the ability of a graphic artist to use Photoshop. They're those skills that you learn in school or the classroom. And without these skills, you will have much difficulty being productive in the traditional sense.
- Soft skills are those skills that allow you to interact effectively with others. They're the ability to speak clearly, write clearly, work as a team member, keep confidences, and stand up for what's wrong. They're the skills that you learned outside the classroom.

### Rule #18 - Your soft skills will dictate your effectiveness as a leader

As a leader, it's the soft skills that make all of the difference in the world. You can be the best technician on the face of the planet. If you cannot effectively interact with others, you'll never be a successful leader. Further, the higher your leadership aspirations are, the more important these skills become.

There's a classic HBR article on this topic called "Skills of an Effective Administrator". It's written by Robert Katz and was published in 1974. In it, Katz defines three critical dimensions for success of an administrator: technical, conceptual, and interpersonal. He puts forward the premise that in order to be effective in the workplace you need to possess skills in each of these dimensions. I could not agree more; however, in my experience it's the conceptual and interpersonal skills that define leaders.

Katz isn't the only one to highlight the importance of soft skills. Earlier I mentioned one of my all time favorite books: Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Carnegie's book is a case study of life. It's a compendium of rules based on his experiences interacting with other people. I can't think of any better place to start if you're looking to develop your soft skills.

Folks, I have been in countless meetings where decisions on promotions, demotions, and staff reductions were made. Without fail, these decisions are made based on the soft skills and not the hard skills. The hard skills may get you in the door, but the soft skills are going to dictate how long

you stay there and how high you rise. As a leader, you need to develop your personal soft skills and make sure that your team is receiving appropriate guidance on how to do the same.

One "soft skill" that I've had difficulty learning is knowing when to shut up. I'm closing off this chapter now, as there's no reason for me to explain what Carnegie does so brilliantly. Buy the book. Read it. Use it.

**ACTION ITEM 18:** Pick up a copy of Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and read it. Alternately, you can get a one page summary of it [here](#)

## Step 19 - Your People Are the Priority



With the pace of business these days, it's easy to get caught up in pursuing the next project, the next objective, the next dollar. It's also extremely dangerous to fall in to this trap and lose sight of what is really important...

Success as a leader requires that you balance the interaction between your co-workers, your customers, and your pocketbook. And, while we live in an "and" world, the reality is on occasion you will need to make tradeoffs.

When this time comes, the sequence **MUST** be people first, customers second, and financial results third. No doubt

some who read this will disagree. The customer-centric will argue that without the customer we would not be here. That customer is king and must be protected at all cost. The profit-centric will argue that we're not a charity and the bottom line must always rule supreme. If we don't follow this path our days as a business are numbered. They are both wrong.

What is a business without the people? Sure you've got all the processes and procedures that define how the business works; however, what if you get to the point where these processes and procedures can be picked up and moved to a new company? What if you get to the point where things are so commoditized that the people doing the processes do not matter? The efficiency experts see this as the Holy Grail of business. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we get to the point where the people do not matter, it means that our business has become a commodity. It means that others will emulate. It means that the end is near. Seth Godin writes of this often in his works which I'd encourage everyone to read – start with Purple Cow, Tribes, and Lynchpin. The only sustainable path for a business is to ensure that it constantly attracts and retains the top performing employees. Any other path will fail as over time the absence of the human element will result in a myopic entity that will be tripped up by a more nimble competitor.

The implication of the above is that your people are your most valuable asset. Which leads us to rule #19:

### **Rule #19 - You must continually recognize and reward your team**

From the time we're born we look for approval from those around us. As small children we seek our parents' reassurance; as we grow we look for the approval of our friends; and, as we transition in to the workplace, we seek positive feedback from those around us – especially from our leaders. We are wired to look for the positive feedback. And as a leader you need to make sure you are wired to provide that positive feedback appropriately. You need to understand how to provide both recognition and rewards.



This is where things become a bit tricky. While all are wired to look for positive feedback, the manner in which each person likes to receive the feedback is unique. While there's no absolute, there are two basic rules that I apply:

- Recognition must be handled carefully. Some individuals thrive on receiving it publicly. Others shudder at the thought of being publicly recognized. In general, the "concentric circle" approach works well. Start with one-on-one recognition. Move to recognizing the individual in the presence of their close peers. With each successive recognition, continue to expand the circle until it becomes clear that the individual being recognized is uncomfortable. In this manner you'll be able to gauge how and where to recognize each individual.
- Rewards are almost always best handled in private. Rarely is it the case that an individual wants his/her co-workers to be aware of their financial situation. Find a private time when the reward may be presented and do so quietly.

While these two rules are good guideposts, they are by no means absolute. Exceptional or extraordinary situations will often dictate that you do exactly the opposite of the above rules! That leads to the following:

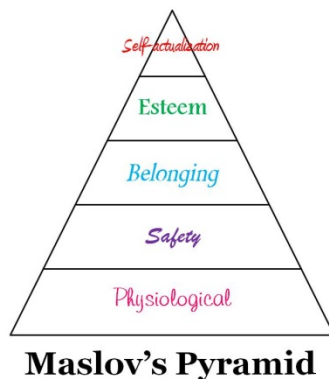
- The more exceptional the accomplishment, the more the need to have the reward or recognition be beyond what the individual would normally be comfortable with.

When you think about this, it makes perfect sense. When you have an individual that is a consistent, solid performer that you want to recognize or reward, you should do so in the manner that is "customary". Hence the first two rules. However, as the situation becomes more and more exceptional, you need to make the manner of the reward or recognition more exceptional. Hence, the need to do something totally out of the ordinary. If you just follow the "ordinary" path you aren't demonstrating the exceptional nature of the accomplishment.

Providing rewards or recognition is one of the easiest ways to drive employee engagement. It's also one of the most overlooked and least used. That's a real shame as it deprives two parties. First, it deprives the party deserving of the reward or recognition. However, equally importantly, it deprives the leader of the opportunity to provide the positive reinforcement. And regardless of age, size, ethnicity, or gender the universal truth exists that it's better to give than to receive. You're really missing out if you fail to provide rewards and recognition freely.

**ACTION ITEM 19: Create a spreadsheet listing each of your team members. Record each time you provide them with either a reward or recognition, record the nature of the reward or recognition, and record their response. At the end of the month review the spreadsheet for lessons learned.**

## Step 20 - Eat!



Is there anyone out there that does not enjoy Thanksgiving dinner? How about the Fourth of July BBQ? Or the office potluck where everyone brings copious amounts of food?

At the base of Maslow's pyramid is food. We are hard wired to want to seek out nourishment. Rule 20 focuses on this need:

**Rule #20 - Share meals with your team on a regular basis.**

Some may be puzzling a bit as to why this is amongst the thirty critical lessons of leadership. It becomes obvious as soon as you think about it for a bit. As Maslow pointed out, people are hard wired to make sure they have enough to eat. In addition, we evolved to work together as groups. There was the hunting and gathering that took place followed by the feast. With our bellies full we relaxed for just a moment prior to having to refocus on the next threat that needed to be overcome. The one's amongst the tribe that hunted or gathered the best were the most valuable to the tribe. They held a special place as providers.

If you don't buy in to my evolutionary rationale, you'd be hard pressed to disagree that the simple act of providing food for another is appreciated in all cultures. Regardless of the religion you follow, there's almost certainly a special place reserved for dining as a group. So if we have an act that individuals are hard wired to pursue and is widely appreciated across cultures, doesn't it make sense to participate?

For those of you that still doubt the importance of dining and relationships, let me offer three instances for your consideration.

- First, let's consider the concept of "executive dining rooms". These are those special places where the top managers go for their meals. That place where they get special treatment. Not familiar with these? Good! At one time they were extremely prevalent; however, corporations eliminated them as they realized they were creating a chasm in the workplace.
- Second, consider the last time you had a really important client in to visit for the day. Did you take him/her out to dinner? Did it help you to connect? Did they appreciate it? There's a reason that you sit down for dinner together the day before a big meeting – and it's not to get nourishment!
- Finally, when you were in the early stages of your relationship with your spouse, did you take him/her to dinner? Was it fun? Appreciated? Do they still appreciate you taking them to dinner after 25 years of marriage?

All of the questions above are rhetorical. You know that dining with others is appreciated. You just may not have thought about how important it is to dine with your team specifically. By taking the time

to stop work, sit down with one or more of your team, and enjoy a meal together, you're doing multiple things simultaneously:

- You're giving them your time – the most precious thing you have to give.
- You're acknowledging a form of commonality. While you all have different roles, you all must eat. You're all human.
- You're literally becoming their equal by sitting down at the table. You're all at the same level. A word of caution here, avoid the "head of the table" as it sends the tacit message that you're in a power position.
- You're providing them with the opportunity to talk to you. Feedback from your team is priceless!
- You're showing another side of you. When you're dining the other aspects of your life will come through.
- You're showing them that it's OK to step away from work for a bit and focus on other aspects of life.

The action item for this step involves taking your team to lunch on a regular basis. While they will appreciate the act immensely, there's an even bigger benefit from taking them to lunch. Taking them to lunch allows you to give them a form of a gift. And there's a reason the age old adage is that "it is better to give than receive".

**ACTION ITEM 20 - Schedule a lunch for your entire team. Repeat at least one time every quarter.**

## Step 21 - Good Intentions...



You have no doubt heard that "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". There's probably no better adage available to remember rule 21:

### **Rule #21 - A leader must make execution their primary focus**

Think about it for a moment. You've got two individuals. One's brilliant, polished, savvy, knows his way around the business. He has the best ideas and knows all the right people. He's got a rolodex full of contacts. And he makes plan, after plan, after plan. And never actually moves forward. The second is a plodder. He's not the smartest or most polished. He works long hours, stumbles often, and always seems to be doing things the hard way. Yet each day, he moves the ball forward, accomplishes one additional goal. Who's the leader?

Execution is critical to being an effective leader. Without driving forward progress, all the theories in the world are worthless. As a leader you need to recognize this truism. The biggest challenge to execution is often the fear of failure – we'll address that topic in step 25. A quick disclaimer for all of you. The first guy is likely going to have a LOT of success as well. He may not be a leader, but that rolodex is darn powerful!

While the importance of execution has been drilled in to my head by a lifetime of experiences, there's one book on the topic that provides, in my opinion, the best clear, concise summary of the topic: *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. Their framework suggests three key building blocks and three key processes that are at the center of an execution centric organization:

### **Execution has three building blocks:**

1. Coaching the seven essential leader behaviors
2. Creating a culture for change
3. Having the right people in place

### **Execution has three core processes:**

1. Link your strategy and operations via a people process.
2. Implement a strategic management process.
3. Implement an operational management process.

A leader would be well served to evaluate their organization against the aforementioned three building blocks and three core processes that Bossidy and Charan's outline in their book.

Some may be wondering why the topic of execution is buried all the way down at step 21 in the list. It's by design. Execution may be accomplished in a number of ways. Further, many **focus** only on execution. That single mindedness can destroy a leader as they begin to put results in front of their people. Placing it at step 21 allows us to highlight the importance of execution, but also to remind leaders that execution without the right behaviors can be a disaster.

**ACTION ITEM 21:** Read *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan and evaluate your organization against the framework they suggest. You can get an overview of the book [here](#).

## Step 22 - Simplify, Simplify, Simplify



Many of you are probably familiar with the concept of Ockham's razor - the simplest, most obvious solution is often the best. And while William of Ockham gave rise to the concept in the 1300's, its history can be traced back to Aristotle and the Greek philosophers. Now I don't know about you, but for me if something started with Aristotle, has withstood the test of time, and makes sense when I hear it, I normally try and incorporate the idea in to my day-to-day living.

A couple of key questions arise when you apply Ockham's razor to the concept of leadership. So if the simple and the obvious are what a leader is to promote, how should he/she do that? Further, aren't we at risk if we promote the simple and obvious that we will become simply a "me to" organization? The answer is appropriately simple: process.

As a leader, you must continually push for the establishment of and adherence to processes in the organization. Processes will do two things. First, they will ensure that things are repeatable and predictable. This is absolutely critical as the expectations of a quality product or service have grown exponentially over the past half century. We've come to expect perfection from our products and services; and, as a result, companies are coming closer and closer to that ideal. That has been driven by a shift to process centric thinking. Second, they will ensure that the minimum necessary time is devoted to each task. Again, processes have carried the day on this front. With the emergence of process centric cultures, we have seen the time required for tasks reduce simultaneously with the improvement in quality. I can still remember Dr. Devore back at the University of Illinois preaching the importance of Deming's philosophies back when I was an undergraduate student. For those of you not familiar with Deming's work, he was at the heart of the reconstruction effort in Japan after World War II. He instilled the concept of process control in the Japanese manufacturing industry. I'll leave it to you to decide how well that worked out...

While working for Caterpillar around 2000, I personally witnessed the power of a leadership team embracing the concept of process. Caterpillar's strategic leadership team made the decision to deploy "6 Sigma" throughout the organization. This was not optional -- the entire company was required to embrace this new concept; and, not surprisingly, this initiative had a dramatic impact on the profitability of the company. The question is why was this so effective? Two reasons. First, the leadership set the course and demanded compliance. Leadership let everyone know that this initiative was not optional. That's a key lesson that we visited in some of our earlier steps. Second, and equally important in my mind, is that the introduction of 6 Sigma forced a process centric methodology on the organization. While the change did not happen day one, over the course of three years the organization went from one dominated by "the power of personality" to one dominated by "facts and data". Previously, the senior managers each set their own course, based on their own opinions. And in many cases this worked great! However, in a fair number of cases, those opinions were not always well founded. The introduction of a process centric culture forced everyone

to answer the "why" question. The good ideas thrived. The bad ideas floundered. A process centric culture is key to the success of any organization.

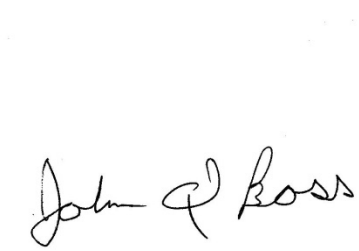
**Rule #22 - Ensure that processes exist for and are used by all key business functions.**

A bit of additional information for you. You're going to encounter the cynics / naysayers that argue "moving to a process centric culture is going to kill our creativity and innovation". Poppycock.

There's nothing that says a process centric culture needs to be constraining. If your design process includes fun rooms, late night pizza parties, and brainstorming sessions so be it. If your product development cycle includes massive spending on basic R&D so be it. However, when we speak about creativity, it needs to be with regards to our creative process. The exact nature of that process is open to the participants. But you have to define the process. If you don't you're relying on the power of particular individuals. And that rarely ends well.

**ACTION ITEM 22 - Have all of your team define the processes they use. Review them together and ask two questions over and over again: (i) Why? and (ii) Is there anything you would like to change?**

## Step 23 - Completed Staff Work



Sometimes you come across a timeless piece of information. Something that's as applicable today as it was the day it was originally published. "The Doctrine of Completed Staff Work" is one of these gems. It appeared in the *Army-Navy Journal* in 1942; however, its actual origin is in question. One thing's for certain, it's been around for years and it incredibly insightful:

### The Doctrine of Completed Staff Work

#### Army-Navy Journal -January 1942

The following interesting and instructive paper is being distributed to officers of the Provost Marshal General's office and school:

1. The doctrine of "completed staff work" is a doctrine of this office.
2. "Completed Staff Work" is a study of a problem and presentation of a solution, by a staff officer, in such form that all that remains to be done on the part of the head of the staff division, or the commander, is to indicate his approval or disapproval of the completed action. The words "completed action" are emphasized because the more difficult the problem is, the more the tendency is to present the problem to the chief in piecemeal fashion. It is your duty as a staff officer to work out the details. You should not consult your chief in the determination of those details, no matter how perplexing they may be. You may and should consult other staff officers. The product, whether it involves the pronouncement of a new policy or affects an established one, should, when presented to the chief for approval or disapproval, be worked out in finished form.
3. The impulse, which often comes to the inexperienced staff officer to ask the chief what to do, recurs more often when the problem is difficult. It is accompanied by a feeling of mental frustration. It is so easy to ask the chief what to do, and it appears so easy for him to answer. Resist that impulse. You will succumb to it only if you do not know your job. It is your job to advise the chief what to do, not to ask him what you ought to do. He needs answers, not questions. Your job is to study, write, restudy, and rewrite until you have evolved a single proposed action - the best one of all you have considered. Your chief merely approves or disapproves.
4. Do not worry your chief with long explanations and memoranda. Writing a memorandum to your chief does not constitute completed staff work, but writing a memorandum for your chief to send to someone else does. Your views should be placed before him in finished form.



so that he can make them his views simply by signing his name. In most instances, completed staff work results in a single document prepared for the signature of the chief, without accompanying comment. If the proper result is reached, the chief will usually recognize it at once. If he wants comment or explanation, he will ask for it.

5. The theory of completed staff work does not preclude a "rough draft" but the rough draft must not be a half-baked idea. It must be complete in every respect except that it lacks the requisite number of copies and need not be neat. But a rough draft must not be used as an excuse for shifting to the chief the burden of formulating the action.
6. The "completed staff work" theory may result in more work for the staff officer, but it results in more freedom for the chief. This is as it should be. Further, it accomplishes two things:
  - The chief is protected from half-baked ideas, voluminous memoranda, and immature oral presentments.
  - The staff officer who has a real idea to sell is enabled to more readily find a market.
7. When you have finished your "completed staff work" the final test is this: If you were the chief, would you be willing to sign the paper you have prepared - and to stake your professional reputation on its being right? If the answer is in the negative, take it back and work it over because it is not yet "completed staff work."

For close to twenty years I have been carrying a copy of "The Doctrine of Completed Staff Work" with me. I've read it literally 1,000s of time and shared it with 100's of people. It's that good.

### **Rule #23 - Enforce the principles of the doctrine of completed staff work.**

There is one caveat with the document: you need to reinforce with your team that you **ARE** available and interested in "brainstorming" with them at the right times. Unfortunately I shared the document with one co-worker and did not make this point. Several months later, I received feedback that I was "closed" to new ideas and did not want to "hear anything", but rather simply wanted to give instructions and get back "what I wanted". They cited this document! After re-reading with this lens, I can see where some folks might be inclined to interpret the guidance extremely literally. With that in mind, I've always shared the document with a form of a disclaimer:

- "I've found this document to be extremely helpful to me and others. I use it as a litmus test for the assignments that I'm given; and, as a reminder that my boss has his/her challenges that he/she is facing. While I don't think you should take every word of the document literally, it is a great framework that you can use on just about any task you are assigned".

Since I've tossed in this disclaimer, I've never received anything but positive feedback about the document.

**ACTION ITEM 23 - (i) Print out a copy of "The Doctrine of Completed Staff Work" and review it daily for the next month, (ii) Share the document with your team.**

## Step 24 - The Importance of the Physical Environment



A scotoma is a blind spot. Something that is there as plain as day for everyone else and yet something that we cannot personally see. We all have them. The key is to be aware of them and surround ourselves with others that can "see for us" when we are in danger of the blind spot causing us personal harm.

I remember when I was running a large distribution operation in Denver. The building was a bit older and the HVAC system wasn't quite up to par. My office was located in a corner at the end of a series of heat ducts and the backup baseboard heating system wasn't working either. No big deal to me. I just tossed on an extra sweater + I was out in the facility most of the time anyways. However, each Friday morning I'd hold a staff meeting in my office. One day a staff member confronted me "Are you ever going to get the heat fixed in here?" they asked. I looked at all of my staff and realized that they were all wearing their winter parkas and in obvious physical discomfort. Oops! A quick call to maintenance and a couple of short days later the problem was fixed.

There are two important lessons here. First, to recognize that we all have blind spots and often need the help of others to recognize this. That's not a bad thing and we should welcome the fact that if we build the right team those around us will ensure we are protected from our blindness. Second, while the way each of us perceives our environment is different, the perceptions influence how we feel and act in our environment. It's easy to dismiss a cold office, run down furniture, or peeling paint as no big deal as it doesn't bother us. Conversely, it's easy to dismiss opulent furnishings, executive dining rooms, and boondoggles to tropical locales as ridiculous. However, they can be absolutely necessary depending on the type of individuals you are working with. Always keep in mind that, whether the physical environment is spartan or lavish, it makes a statement and influences the behavior of our team.

### Rule #24 - The physical environment in the workplace is critical to your team

I'm not passing judgment or suggesting which is better – spartan or lavish. However, I am stating unequivocally that the physical environment will affect your team. You need to recognize this and make sure that you do all you can to provide the "proper" environment for the type of business you are in.

**ACTION ITEM 24:** Have one peer, one team member, and one client tell you (i) what they like best about your work environment and (ii) what they like least about your work environment. Adjust accordingly.

## Step 25 - Celebrate Failure



One of the best things about leadership is that the lessons come from the strangest places! To illustrate the next key step, we turn our attention to a poet from the UK in the early 1800's - Alfred Lord Tennyson. Tennyson gave us these famous lines:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;

I feel it, when I sorrow most;

'Tis better to have loved and lost

Than never to have loved at all

(From Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam:27")

All too often we believe – erroneously – that we have to be perfect. We spend inordinate amounts of time planning, redrafting, reviewing, circulating, wondering, emailing, redrafting, meeting, reviewing, and so on, and so on. You get the idea. We somehow believe that by spending a little more time, we'll "get it right" and it'll work out perfectly. How naive. How arrogant. The reality is you will fail. And falling prey to the "paralysis by analysis trap" isn't going to avoid the failure. It's simply going to delay failures occurrence; and, in turn, delay you from getting to your objective.

### Rule #25 - Encourage failure early and often.

By overcoming your fear of failure and embracing it, you can actually accelerate success' progress.

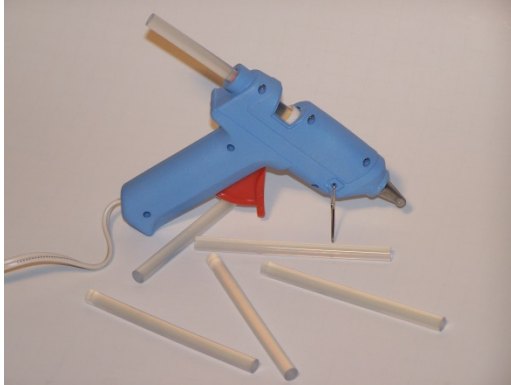
Let's refresh your memory: Thomas Edison experimented with over 1600 different filaments before he figured out how to make tungsten work. One of his most famous quotes is, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work".

Genius comes from embracing failure, analyzing why it occurred, formulating a new plan, and repeating the process. Each time we fail we gather critical information about the situation we are facing. Information that teaches us what will not work. Further, each time we fail, we see that the world does not end. We see that we have learned something new. We show those around us that it's worth trying new things. We create a culture of curiosity that enables our team to do great things.

When you give up on perfection and embrace failure you open the door to success. With each new trial you move a little bit closer to passing through that door.

**ACTION ITEM 25 - The next time one of your team brings you a "failure", ask three questions. (i) "What did you learn?", (ii) "What are you going to try next?", (iii) "How quickly can you try it?".**

## Step 26 - Discipline Redux



Back in step 1, we focused on the concept of "discipline or regret". We emphasized the importance of taking the necessary time to focus on your development as a leader. However, there's a reason to revisit our friend discipline:

**Rule #26 - A disciplined team will always outperform the competition.**

That gives rise to a key corollary:

**Corollary 26.1 - You must (i) model discipline in your behaviors at all times and (ii) demand the same level of discipline from your team.**

Now mind you, I'm not encouraging you to establish some sort of elite military unit in the workplace.

I am encouraging you to take the lessons we have learned to date and make sure that you have the conviction to apply them. We've hinted around at the concept of discipline in a number of the previous steps. The point of this step is to explicitly call out the need for a leader to follow through to completion; and, discipline is key to that follow through.

Since the time I was introduced to the "discipline or regret" concept, I have thought of the concept no less than a half dozen times each day. In almost every instance, the thought was triggered by my **lack** of discipline. By my **lack** of commitment. And, as you might expect, the times when the thought emerged, were **not** times where all was going well! In spite of knowing the importance of this concept; in spite of making solid, reasonable, actionable plans; in spite of knowing the importance of sticking to the process; I still find myself stumbling multiple times each day. And, in all likelihood, so will you. That's OK.

Discipline is the key that holds together all of the steps for a leader. It's the glue that allows you to persevere when things get tough. It's that intangible that you need to cultivate daily. It's not easy. It's elusive. But it is incredibly powerful!

In the previous step we emphasized the importance of celebrating failures. So it is with discipline. If you had the foresight to develop the plan, start down the path, get half way there, and then lose discipline, great! You've made it half way. You've seen what you were able to accomplish when you remained disciplined. You've seen the challenges that emerged when you broke that discipline. You have just gotten a wonderful lesson that you can learn from. And next time you may only make it 51% of the way. And the following time 52%. But you'll be striving to improve your discipline. And over time it will improve. Guaranteed.

**ACTION ITEM 26:** Post Jim Rohn's quote "We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret" in a place where both you and your team can see it multiple times each day. Celebrate each time you recognize you just had a "pain event".



Financial  
Planning

Making Plans To Reach Your Goals.

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## Step 27 - Ask, Don't Tell



While "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" may be more familiar to many of us, "Ask, Don't Tell" is really where we should be spending our mental energy. Read that again – "Ask, Don't Tell". Now take just a couple of moments to think about what that is saying....

You back? What went on in your mind when you stepped back and thought about "Ask, Don't Tell"? Another question, how did you feel when I **told you** "Read that again"? How about when I **told you** "Take just a couple of moments to think about"? How do those feelings compare to what

you're feeling now that I'm asking you questions?

If you're like most people, a totally different response is elicited when you are **told** to do something versus **asked** to do something. While telling may result in compliance, it rarely results in commitment.

### **Rule #27 - You will have more success asking questions than telling people what to do**

What's amazing about rule #27 is that we all know it's true and yet we somehow forget its importance when we are installed in a leadership position! Think about it. How many times have you seen a new leader put in to his/her role and they immediately assume that they know everything? They take it upon themselves to establish their authority. They start telling people what to do. Folks, positions are given but respect is earned. And folks, nothing will lose respect more than **telling**. And nothing will earn respect more than **asking**.

Normally I like to highlight each rule with some sort of story, example, or deeper explanation.

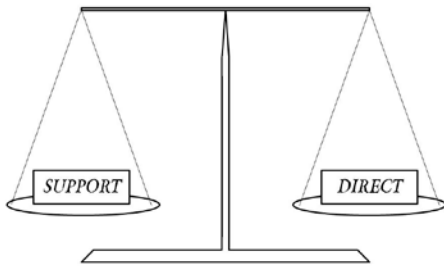
However, in this case I'm not going to do that. Rather, I'm going to ask you a favor. Can you think back on the times you have witnessed failures in leadership? What do you remember about how these leaders embraced their teams? Do you think they would have had more success if they spent a bit more time asking for input and listening to that input?

I skipped the example for two reasons. First, while stories are a wonderful way to convey a message, they're most powerful when people can relate to the story. By asking you to reflect on failures in leadership, **after** planting the seed of "Ask, Don't Tell", there's a high probability that you were able to tap your memory banks and come up with an example. That's more powerful than just about any story I could craft. Second, it was a perfect opportunity to let you see (i) how to use "Ask, Don't Tell" and (ii) how effective "Ask, Don't Tell" is. Hopefully, you'll buy in to step #27. And what's the worst that could happen if you try today's action item?

**ACTION ITEM 27** - For the next week you have to handle any situation you face differently. You're not allowed to tell anyone what to do or what you think. Rather, you have to ask at least three questions to better understand the situation. After asking the "three question minimum", ask the question "What do you think we should do?".

**BONUS ACTION ITEM** - Reread step 23 (Completed Staff Work) and ask yourself "How can I combine steps 23 and 27?" Some light bulbs may come on when you complete this task!

## Step 28 - It Depends



There's just about nothing in life that's absolute. After outlining the importance of **always** asking questions in step 27, I'm going to seemingly contradict myself in step 28. Bear with me please....

Leadership requires that you deal with a variety of individuals and a variety of situations. The key to success is recognizing that a single style is not going to work all of the time as (i) different situations require different techniques and (ii) different people require different approaches.

We all know the "one trick pony" in the office. He/she is absolutely brilliant at one thing. In certain, specific situations, he/she does a wonderful job. Woe to the team that has the "one trick pony" as a leader. That team is almost always frustrated and underperforming. Frustrated as not every situation is a nail, so the leader needs to quit using their darn hammer! Driving screws with a hammer just does not work out very well.

### **Rule #28 - A leader applies different styles depending on the situation he/she is faced with**

What's the solution? While there's lots of ways to deal with the variety of situations you'll encounter, I'm going to put forward Blanchard and Hersey's "Situational Leadership Theory" as the quickest, easiest, and most effective system to implement.

The framework works as follows:

- Individuals or teams may be classified according to two dimensions and two levels:
  - Competence - High or Low
  - Commitment - High or Low
- The two dimensions create four developmental levels:
  - D1 - Low competence and high commitment
  - D2 - Low competence and low commitment
  - D3 - High competence and low commitment
  - D4 - High competence and high commitment
- Leadership involves two behavioral dimensions at two levels:
  - Supportive behavior - High or low
  - Directive behavior - High or low
- The two dimensions create leadership styles:
  - S1 - High directive and low supportive (Directive)
  - S2 - High directive and high supportive (Coaching)
  - S3 - Low directive and high supportive (Supporting)
  - S4 - Low directive and low supportive (Delegating)



- Depending on the developmental level of the individual or team a different leadership style needs to be applied.

While there are no absolutes in life, for the most part, you can apply D1 to S1, D2 to S2, D3 to S3, and D4 to S4. Let's look at each of the situations briefly:

- We have a new team member who is extremely excited about their job (D1). The leader is likely going to outline the tasks to be completed and turn them loose to complete (S1). Assuming we've done a good job with our process definitions (see step 22) you're probably going to get a pretty good result.
- Our new team member has now mastered the basics and has some skills; however they're becoming disillusioned with the job. It's not quite as easy as they thought and it's becoming a bit "boring" (D2). The leader needs to continue to be clear on what should be done as the skills aren't quite to the level they need to be; however, they need to spend some time explaining and working closely with the employee. They need to reassure them that they are capable and that they'll make it through this transient phase (S2).
- The team member then progresses to the point where they're pretty darn efficient and competent in completing the tasks at hand. However, they're still a bit unsure as to how they fit in to the bigger picture at work. They're almost to the point where they are a long term committed team member, but not quite there (D3). The leader needs to back off on the directions as they know their role – probably better than the leader. However, reassurance needs to continue to be provided (S3).
- Finally, the team member has bought in. He/she is a great team member that we want to have on board for an extended period of time. They're fully capable and fully committed (D4). It's time for the leader to get the heck out of the way! You don't need to tell them what to do and you probably need to be hovering over them asking them how they're doing – they'll come to you with their needs (S4).

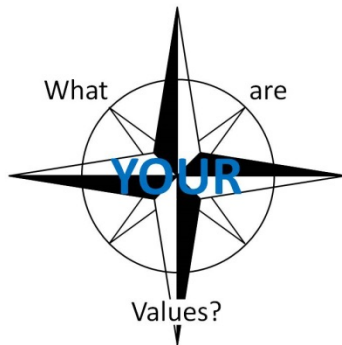
While the above is an idealized version of reality, hopefully it illustrates the point – individuals at different levels of development need to have different leadership styles applied. Your job as a leader is to constantly be assessing the situation and deciding how to balance between the directive and the supportive.

Returning briefly to the contradiction I mentioned. While I firmly believe that you should "Ask, Don't Tell" as much as possible, there are situations where "Telling" is required. Normally it involves two specific elements: an inexperienced team and a crisis. At these times, you're going to have to gravitate to that S1 leadership style. And if you don't your ship may go down. Don't forget that as a leader, sometimes you will need to make the tough decisions and take the tough actions. It's expected of you – see step 9 if you have any questions!

**ACTION ITEM 28 - Assess your entire team according to the D1-D4 framework. Now evaluate how you have been handling them from the S1-S4 framework. You may find out that the problem is not with their performance but with your leadership style.**

**USEFUL RESOURCE - Check out [this link](#) for a sample workbook from Ken Blanchard on situational leadership**

## Step 29 - Do The Right Things



One of my favorite – and I feel most accurate – sayings is: we judge ourselves by our intentions, others judge us by our actions. Ultimately it's not what you say, but what you do that matters most to people.

To guide your actions, it's invaluable to have a set of values to serve as a moral compass. Values are really interesting things. We all have them. We all know implicitly what they are. And yet we're often uncomfortable discussing them openly. I'd offer a couple of reasons for that:

- Actions **do** speak louder than words! When we take the time to openly discuss values, it calls attention to our failures. That makes people uncomfortable -- to have failed at something as important as values can cut deep. It shouldn't. Failure is part of life. We can only learn and grow when we are faced with challenges.
- Focusing on values forces us to confront uncomfortable things. When we turn our attention to values, we are focusing on what is most important to us. If the discussion points out that there's a misalignment in the team, that means that someone is going against our core beliefs. That's a pretty serious situation that's now moved from the background to the forefront. We're forced to deal with this. While uncomfortable, it's critical to surface these disconnects -- the first step to solving any problem is to acknowledge its existence.

This gives rise to rule 29:

**Rule #29 - You need to have a set of values that you publicly proclaim and live by at all times.**

I had the privilege of working for Caterpillar for 18 years. Around the year 2000, the company introduced a new strategic plan along with an explicit set of values. Years later, I can't tell you a single item on that strategic plan. However, I can still tell you these four values over a decade later (you'll see them in just a bit). At the time I was extremely impressed with what the leaders came up with. Over time, I've become even more impressed as I feel that the four values that were introduced provide a solid foundation for a personal value system. Now, mind you, they're not for everyone and they're -- in my opinion -- missing one critical element. However, they're a great starting point / case study that you can use as you establish your own personal set of values.

Around 2003 I had the pleasure to meet Sandra Ford Walston. Sandra helped me to fill in the gap that I'd always felt was missing in Caterpillar's set of values. It's actually quite interesting to look at what I call the "fifth value" and see (i) how difficult it would be for an "old school" company like Caterpillar to adopt and (ii) to see how it might have a dramatic impact on how Caterpillar pursues business and functions as a company. It was something that served me well on a personal basis while I was with the company; however, it was also something that often put me at odds with the

corporate culture while I was there. However, for me, it was "non-negotiable" and critical to the environment I wanted to be a part of.

Between Caterpillar and Sandra, I've adopted the following five values to help guide me through my day to day activities.

- **Integrity** - The power of honesty.
- **Excellence** - The power of quality.
- **Teamwork** - The power of working together.
- **Commitment** - The power of responsibility.
- **Courage** - The power of risk taking.

Rather than define each of the above terms, I like to think in terms of what an ideal organization would look like if everyone possessed the aforementioned values:

We would have a team of individuals who could always be counted on to do the right thing regardless of the situation. These individuals would never be satisfied with "second rate" efforts and would constantly be striving to improve themselves and those around them.

They'd be working together continually to ensure that success was not achieved at an individual level; but, rather, as a team. And they'd hold themselves accountable at all times to the goals they set. You'd know that if they gave you their word on when and how a task would be completed, it would be completed on time at the expected level of performance.

Finally, they'd all be willing to put themselves at risk, to take chances, and to put the well being of others in front of their own well being at all times.

Values should inspire us to a set of ideal behaviors. They're a litmus test against which we can judge our actions. They're foundational to our success.

**ACTION ITEM 29: Take the time to draft your own set of values. Make sure these values are posted prominently. Start each day by reviewing your previous day's actions against these values and committing to have the present day's actions align with these values.**

## Step 30 - The Best for Last...

Well, if you're still with me at step 30, I've got just one thing to say: **THANK YOU!**



### Rule #30 - Remember to say thank you often.

Disappointed in the simplicity of this final rule? I hope not. I hope that you already value the power of these two simple words. However, just in case their impact has slipped your mind, let's talk a bit about "thank you".

Think about the last time that you **really** thanked someone. You remember, that time when you were stuck. You were facing some challenge or obstacle that seemed insurmountable. Your friend or colleague took the time to sit with you. To listen. To ask questions. To help you figure out what to do. At the end of the conversation, the cloudiness in your head had disappeared. You knew where to go, what to do, and it just made sense. And you told the person "thank you" and **really** meant it! At that moment you were grateful beyond belief; and, as the saying goes, words could never repay what was given to you. And yet, thank you **does** repay just fine! Here's the irony, it's exactly because you know that word cannot repay that they **do** repay....

We have all been stuck and had someone reach out and help us. That help has been priceless. And the only thing that we can do at that moment in time is offer a "thank you". We know it's not enough, but we offer it with 100% sincerity. And because we know how priceless the gift we just received is, we know that offering a sincere thank you is actually the most precious currency in existence. When we get to the point where we offer that sincere thank you, we have acknowledged to the person being thanked that they have touched our soul. We have let them know that they have provided priceless gifts.

It's because we know how valuable a sincere thank you is that we are so deeply moved when we receive sincere thanks. And that's why you need to say thank you to those around you. It's an expression of gratitude, a recognition of the gift the other party delivered, and an acknowledgement that the two of you have shared something of significant value. Thank you is the glue that keeps us together. And failing to say thank you will result in the team pulling apart. Why would you let this happen when the currency of "thank you" is so readily at our disposal?

And with that, I say "thank you" for allowing me the opportunity to share some thoughts on leadership with you. If you're able to use just one thing out of this book to make your or someone else's life better, it will have been worth the effort. It will have been my way of giving back to all of those that gave so freely to me. It will have been a confirmation that maybe I have learned a bit about leadership over the past 47 years. With that, your final assignment....

**ACTION ITEM 30 - For the next week keep a tally sheet of (i) how many times you say thank you and (ii) how many times people tell you thank you. It's not a contest. It's an opportunity to raise your**

awareness of the power of thank you and an opportunity to consider if you're missing the chance to exercise this power more frequently.

## Conclusion:

You now have a choice to make. The easy choice is to say "That was great". And do absolutely nothing. The right choice is to (i) print out the rules, (ii) print out the actions, and (iii) follow the plan. Simple and straight forward.

My sincerest hope is that every person that reads this book takes away at least one new idea that they are able to put in to action. If that is the case, this effort will have been remarkably successful. In fact, if even one person takes away a new idea and puts it action, the effort will have been remarkably successful.

## The Thirty Rules:

Rule #1 - Every day begins with you focusing for 30 minutes on how to improve as a leader.

Rule #2 - Let everyone know what your weaknesses are and make sure they are aware you are working on improving them.

Rule #3 - Your primary job is to make sure that everyone on your team is more successful.

Rule #4 – You're not your staff's best friend. That doesn't mean you don't support and care about them. It simply means that you have a role to teach and lead and that requires a certain degree of separation.

Rule #5 - If it's not a personnel issue and it's not explicitly forbidden, share the information with your team.

Rule #6 - Establish SMART goals for all of your organization.

Rule #7 – Address performance issues quickly and completely. Without remediation they will not improve and you will simply face a more difficult challenge in the future.

Rule #8 - A leader makes sure that every member of his/her team has a development plan that is being fully executed.

Rule #9 - Establish a firm deadline for all tasks. Stick with the deadline unless it is a matter of life and death.

Rule #10 - Take responsibility for your teams shortcomings and failures.

Rule #11 - Micromanaging is the deadliest sin for a manager.

Rule #12 - Every action a leader takes – in or out of work – shapes his/her team.

Rule #13 - Have at least one passion outside the workplace that you pursue daily.

Rule #14 - You gain freedom by delivering the numbers.

Rule #15 - Advocate for your team regardless of the impact to you

Rule # 16 - Quarterly reviews are mandatory.

Rule #17 - Identify a Leadership Mentor and Learn From Him/Her.

Rule #18 - Your soft skills will dictate your effectiveness as a leader.

Rule #19 - You must continually recognize and reward your team.

Rule #20 - Share meals with your team on a regular basis.

Rule #21 - A leader must make execution their primary focus.

Rule #22 - Ensure that processes exist for and are used by all key business functions.

Rule #23 - Enforce the principles of the doctrine of completed staff work.

Rule #24 - The physical environment in the workplace is critical to your team.

Rule #25 - Encourage failure early and often.

Rule #26 - A disciplined team will always outperform the competition.

Rule #27 - You will have more success asking questions than telling people what to do.

Rule #28 - A leader applies different styles depending on the situation he/she is faced with.

Rule #29 - You need to have a set of values that you publicly proclaim live by at all times.

Rule #30 - Remember to say thank you often.



## Action Item Summary:

**ACTION ITEM 1** – Block 30 minutes every morning to review your leadership aspirations.

**ACTION ITEM 2** - Schedule a one hour meeting with your team to discuss your goal to be a better leader and ask for their help and support in the process.

**ACTION ITEM 3**- Make a commitment to each of your staff members on how you will help them achieve their most important goal. Make sure they are aware of the commitment and that you follow through to completion.

**ACTION ITEM 4** – Find the time to read McClelland and Burnham's HBR article. Prepare a summary and schedule an hour with your staff to go over the concepts. Make sure they understand that while you're on a quest to be a better leader and you'll be looking to help them in the process, you'll still be holding yourself – and them – accountable.

**ACTION ITEM 5** - The next time you attend a staff meeting, a strategic review meeting, or any sort of "exclusive" meeting take the time to write a brief summary (bullet points are great) of the meeting. Share the summary with your staff and ask them if the information was useful in any manner.

**ACTION ITEM 6** – Draft your SMART goals and share them with your team. Let them know that you expect to see the same from them by the end of next week.

**ACTION ITEM 7** - Sit down with your problem child at work and have the conversation.

**ACTION ITEM 8** – Schedule time with each of your staff to establish and document their personal development plan.

**ACTION ITEM 9**- Pull out your to do list and review each item quickly writing down the best course of action based on the current fact set. For each action you listed, write down the worst possible result of taking that action. Now write down the likely outcome of taking that action. For any item where the worst possible outcome is not catastrophic and the likely action is acceptable, take the action. For those actions where the result would be catastrophic, establish a firm deadline and stick to it.

**ACTION ITEM 10** – The next time your team fails defend them like a momma bear would do for her cubs. Let the organization know that the failure was due to you not being a strong enough leader. Commit to resolving the situation in a reasonable time. Then sit down with your team, let them know how you positioned, and ask them to help you craft the new action plan.

**ACTION ITEM 11** - For the next week do not make a single specific request to any of your team members. Instead, each time you need their help, approach them with the following "John, I've got situation 'A' and I was hoping that you could handle it for me". When they attempt to drag you in to micro-management land with a series of question, respond with "I've got confidence that you'll make the right choice. When you come up with the solution, we can sit down and review." Then walk away.

**ACTION ITEM 12** - Replay yesterday in your mind. Think through when you came to work, how you greeted folks, how and where you sat in your meetings, the language you used in your e-mails, what you had for lunch, what you wore, who you called, when you left, where you stopped on your way home, what you learned, whether you exercised, what you had for dinner, etc. Ask yourself if the way you led your day is the way you want your team to lead theirs.

**ACTION ITEM 13:** Head over to YouTube and search for/listen to Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUwjNBjqR-c>). Now open your calendar. Block time on your calendar for a recurring event every day for your one (or more passions). Make sure that under NO circumstances do you let anything supersede this item.

**ACTION ITEM 14:** Get a copy of your boss' SMART goals. Review all of your accomplishments for alignment with his/her objectives. Sit down with him/her and share the findings. During the meeting, ask "What else can I do to make you more successful?".

**ACTION ITEM 15** - Sit down with each of your team. Ask them to identify their one biggest work goal and one biggest personal goal where they need your help. Do everything in your power to make sure they get the required support.

**ACTION ITEM 16:** Schedule and conduct without fail quarterly reviews with each of your teammates.

**ACTION ITEM 17:** By the end of next week identify and sit down with your leadership mentor.

**ACTION ITEM 18:** Pick up a copy of Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and read it. Alternately, you can get a one page summary of it [here](#)

**ACTION ITEM 19:** Create a spreadsheet listing each of your team members. Record each time you provide them with either a reward or recognition, record the nature of the reward or recognition, and record their response. At the end of the month review the spreadsheet for lessons learned.

**ACTION ITEM 20** - Schedule a lunch for your entire team. Repeat at least one time every quarter.

**ACTION ITEM 21:** Read *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan and evaluate your organization against the framework they suggest. You can get an overview of the book [here](#).

**ACTION ITEM 22** - Have all of your team define the processes they use. Review them together and ask two questions over and over again: (i) Why? and (ii) Is there anything you would like to change?

**ACTION ITEM 23** - (i) Print out a copy of "The Doctrine of Completed Staff Work" and review it daily for the next month, (ii) Share the document with your team.

**ACTION ITEM 24:** Have one peer, one team member, and one client tell you (i) what they like best about your work environment and (ii) what they like least about your work environment. Adjust accordingly.

**ACTION ITEM 25** - The next time one of your team brings you a "failure", ask three questions. (i) "What did you learn?", (ii) "What are you going to try next?", (iii) "How quickly can you try it?".

**ACTION ITEM 26:** Post Jim Rohn's quote "We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret" in a place where both you and your team can see it multiple times each day. Celebrate each time you recognize you just had a "pain event".

**ACTION ITEM 27 -** For the next week you have to handle any situation you face differently. You're not allowed to tell anyone what to do or what you think. Rather, you have to ask at least three questions to better understand the situation. After asking the "three question minimum", ask the question "What do you think we should do?".

**ACTION ITEM 28 -** Assess your entire team according to the D1-D4 framework. Now evaluate how you have been handling them from the S1-S4 framework. You may find out that the problem is not with their performance but with your leadership style.

**ACTION ITEM 29:** Take the time to draft your own set of values. Make sure these values are posted prominently. Start each day by reviewing your previous day's actions against these values and committing to have the present day's actions align with these values.

**ACTION ITEM 30 -** For the next week keep a tally sheet of (i) how many times you say thank you and (ii) how many times people tell you thank you. It's not a contest. It's an opportunity to raise your awareness of the power of thank you and an opportunity to consider if you're missing the chance to exercise this power more frequently.

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Thanks again for sharing a bit of your time with me!

Curt

## About the Author

Curt Stowers was born in Orlando, Florida on June 13, 1966. Since that time he's lived in over 20 different places around the world – including most of the Midwest, Denver, Dubai, and Brussels. Since 1987 he has been married to the love of his life Sonya. Together they have three children Amanda, Alexander, and Casey.

He received his formal education from the University of Illinois graduating in 1988 with a BS degree in industrial engineering, in 1990 with a MS in industrial engineering, and 1993 with a PhD in industrial engineering.

In his spare time, Curt enjoys all forms of exercise, fishing, golfing, reading, and writing.

Curt spent just shy of 20 years working with Caterpillar where he worked in the areas of inventory management, project management, commercial management, operations management, purchasing and business development. During the course of his career with Caterpillar he had responsibility for the management of 1,000s of people and \$100's of millions of dollars of business.

In 2005 Curt and Sonya purchased the rights to a Subway franchise. They built the business from scratch and it continues to do well to this day.

In 2011 Curt came to the realization that working in a corporate environment did not allow him to make the impact on the lives of others that he desired. After a bit of time reflecting, he decided to pursue a career in financial planning. His passion for numbers combined with a passion for helping others reach their goals made this an ideal choice. He spent the next two years preparing for a career change in financial planning and holds the CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ designation.

In 2014 Curt established his own financial planning business – F5 Financial Planning. The “F5” in the name refers to the 5 F's that are important to balance in life: faith, friends and family, fitness, and finance. Curt provides fee-only, comprehensive planning. He is licensed as a fiduciary and legally required to work in his client's best interests at all times.

Curt works with entrepreneurs, families, and corporate executives to build and execute financial plans that allow them to achieve their personal and professional goals. His clients have clarity on those things that are most important to them. Further, they sleep well at night knowing that they have a partner helping them monitor and execute the plan to reach their goals.