

*New York Times* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*

JOHN C.  
MAXWELL

— THE —

360°

LEADER

DEVELOPING YOUR INFLUENCE

*from ANYWHERE in the*

ORGANIZATION

— THE —  
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NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO DAN REILAND—

A FRIEND

A STUDENT

A TEACHER

A PARTNER

—A 360-DEGREE LEADER

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## 5. PERSONHOOD

### **Respect**

People follow because of who you are and what you represent.  
NOTE: This step is reserved for leaders who have spent years growing people and organizations. Few make it. Those who do are bigger than life.

## 4. PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

### **Reproduction**

People follow because of what you have done for them.  
NOTE: This is where long-range growth occurs. Your commitment to developing leaders will ensure ongoing growth to the organization and to people. Do whatever you can to achieve and stay on this level.

## 3. PRODUCTION

### **Results**

People follow because of what you have done for the organization.  
NOTE: This is where success is sensed by most people. They like you and what you are doing. Problems are fixed with very little effort because of momentum.

## 2. PERMISSION

### **Relationships**

People follow because they want to.  
NOTE: People will follow you beyond your stated authority. This level allows work to be fun. Caution: Staying too long on this level without rising will cause highly motivated people to become restless.

## I. POSITION

### **Rights**

People follow because they have to.  
NOTE: Your influence will not extend beyond the lines of your job description. The longer you stay here, the higher the turnover and the lower the morale.

Leadership is dynamic, and the right to lead must be earned individually with each person you meet. Where you are on the “staircase of leadership” depends on your history with that person. And with everyone, we start at the bottom of the five steps or levels.

That bottom (or first) level is position. You can only start from the position you have been given, whatever it is: production-line worker, administrative assistant, salesperson, foreman, pastor, assistant manager, and so forth. Your position is whatever it is. From that place, you have certain rights that come with your title. But if you lead people using only your position, and you do nothing else to try to increase your influence, then people will follow you only because they have to. They will follow only within the boundaries of your job description. The lower your stated position, the less positional authority you possess. The good news is that you can increase your influence beyond your title and

position. You can “move up” the staircase of leadership to higher levels.

If you move to level two, you begin to lead beyond your position because you have built relationships with the people you desire to lead. You treat them with dignity and respect. You value them as human beings. You care about them, not just the job they can do for you or the organization. Because you care about them, they begin to trust you more. As a result, they give you permission to lead them. In other words, they begin to follow you because they want to.

The third level is the production level. You move to this phase of leadership with others because of the results you achieve on the job. If the people you lead succeed in getting the job done because of your contribution to the team, then they will look to you more and more to lead the way. They follow you because of what you’ve done for the organization.

To reach the fourth level of leadership, you must focus on developing others. Accordingly, this is called the people-development level of leadership. Your agenda is to pour yourself into the individuals you lead—mentor them, help them develop their skills, and sharpen their leadership ability. What you are doing, in essence, is leadership reproduction. You value them, add value to them, and make them more valuable. At this level, they follow you because of what you’ve done for them.

The fifth and final level is the personhood level, but it is not a level one can strive to reach, because reaching it is outside of your control. Only others can put you there, and they do so because you have excelled in leading them from the first four levels for a long period of time. You have earned the reputation of a level-five leader.

### **DISPOSITION MORE THAN POSITION**

When potential leaders understand the dynamics of gaining influence with people using the Five Levels of Leadership, they come to realize that position has little to do with genuine leadership. Do individuals have to be at the top of the organizational chart to develop relationships with others and get them to like working with them? Do they need to possess the top title to achieve results and help others become productive? Do they have to be president or CEO to teach the people who report to them to see, think, and work like leaders? Of course not. Influencing others is a matter of disposition, not position.

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*Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit.*

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You can lead others from anywhere in an organization. And when you do, you make the organization better. David Branker, a leader who has influenced others from the middle of organizations for years and who currently serves as an executive director in a large church, said, “To do nothing in the middle is to create more weight for the top leader to

move. For some leaders—it might even feel like dead weight. Leaders in the middle can have a profound effect on an organization.”

Every level of an organization depends on leadership from someone. The bottom line is this: Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit. Anyone can choose to become a leader wherever he is. You can make a difference no matter where you are.





trouble at higher levels when the cost of mistakes is high, the impact is far reaching, and the exposure is greater. Mistakes made on a small scale can be easily overcome. Mistakes made when you're at the top cost the organization greatly, and they damage a leader's credibility.

How do you become the person you desire to be? You start now to adopt the thinking, learn the skills, and develop the habits of the person you wish to be. It's a mistake to daydream about "one day when you'll be on top" instead of handling today so that it prepares you for tomorrow. As Hall of Fame basketball coach John Wooden said, "When opportunity comes, it's too late to prepare." If you want to be a successful leader, learn to lead before you have a leadership position.



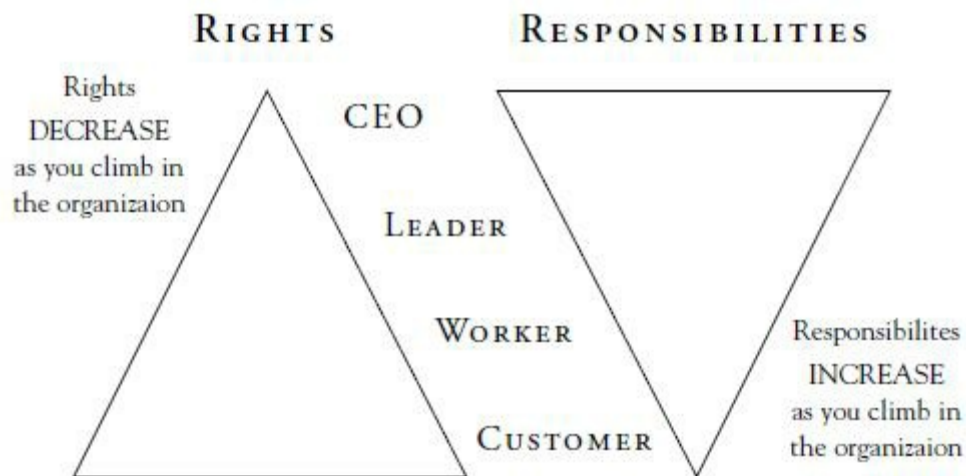




But let's say you become a sales manager over half a dozen people who do what you used to do. You are now more limited than you were before. You can't arrange your schedule however you want anymore because you have to work around the schedules of your six employees, who have to work with their clients. And if you're a good leader, you will encourage the members of your team to work using their own style to maximize their potential, making it that much more difficult for you. Add to that the increased financial pressures that the position brings since you would be responsible for maybe \$25 million in revenue for your company.

If you move up again, let's say to the level of a division manager, then the demands on you increase yet again. And you may now have to work with a number of different departments, each with its own problems, skill sets, and cultures. Good leaders go to their people, connect, find common ground, and empower them to succeed. So in some ways, leaders have less freedom as they move up, not more.

When I teach leadership, I often use the following diagram to help potential leaders realize that as they rise up in the organization, their rights actually decrease instead of increase:



Customers have great freedom and can do almost anything they want. They have no real responsibility to the organization. Workers have more obligations. Leaders have even more, and because of that, they become more limited in terms of their freedom. It is a limitation they choose willingly, but they are limited just the same. If you want to push the limits of your effectiveness, there is a better solution. Learning to lead will blow the lid off of your potential.

## Myth #6

### THE POTENTIAL MYTH:

*“I can’t reach my potential if I’m not the top leader.”*

How many kids say, “Someday I want to grow up to be vice president of the United States”? Probably none. If a child has political aspirations, he wants to be president. If she has a bent toward business, she wants to be a company owner or CEO. Few people aspire to reach the middle. In fact, several years ago, [Monster.com](#), an online job search service, poked fun at this idea by running a television ad showing children saying things such as, “When I grow up, I want to file all day long” and, “I want to claw my way up to middle management.”

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*I believe that people should strive for the top of their game, not the top of the organization.*

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Yet the reality is that most people will never be the top leader in an organization. They will spend their careers somewhere in the middle. Is that okay? Or should everybody play career “king of the hill” and try to reach the top?

I believe that people should strive for the top of their game, not the top of the organization. Each of us should work to reach our potential, not necessarily the corner office. Sometimes you can make the greatest impact from somewhere other than first place. An excellent example of that is Vice President Dick Cheney. He has enjoyed a remarkable career in politics: White House chief of staff to President Gerald Ford, six-term congressman from Wyoming, secretary of defense to President George H. W. Bush, and vice president to the second President Bush. He possesses all the credentials one would need to run for president of the United States. Yet he knows that the top position is not his best role. An article in *Time* magazine described Cheney this way:

When Richard Bruce Cheney was a student at Natrona County High School in Casper, Wyo., he was a solid football player, senior-class president and an above-average student. But he wasn’t the star . . . Inconspicuous, off to the side, backing up a flashier partner, putting out fires when called upon—it’s a role Dick Cheney has played his entire life. Throughout his remarkable career . . . Cheney’s success has derived from his unparalleled skill at serving as the discreet, effective, loyal adviser to higher-profile leaders. He did once flirt with the idea of twirling the flaming baton himself, considering a 1996 run for president. But the idea of putting himself on that stage . . . would have required a rewiring of Cheney’s political DNA. Instead he took an offer in business, figuring he would retire in the job and then do a lot of hunting and fishing. But George W. Bush had a different plan, one that returned Cheney to the role he plays best. As Lynne Cheney told *Time*, her husband “never thought that this would be his job. But if you look back over his whole career, it’s been preparation for this.”<sup>1</sup>

Cheney has reached his potential in the position of vice president, a position few would set as a lifetime career goal. He is highly effective, and he seems to be content. Mary Kay Hill, a longtime aide to former Wyoming senator Alan Simpson, who worked with Cheney on Capitol Hill, said, "You plug him in, and he works anywhere. He just has a real good way of fitting in and working his environment." Cheney appears to be an excellent example of a 360-Degree Leader, someone who knows how to influence others from whatever position he finds himself in.

## Myth #7

### THE ALL-OR-NOTHING MYTH:

“If I can’t get to the top, then I won’t try to lead.”

What are the prospects for your getting to the top of your organization, of someday becoming *the* leader? The reality for most people is that they will never be the CEO. Does that mean they should just give up leading altogether?

That’s what some people do. They look at an organization, recognize they will not be able to make it to the top, and give up. Their attitude is, “If I can’t be the captain of the team, then I’ll take my ball and go home.”

Others enter the process of leadership but then become frustrated by their position in an organization. Why? Because they define *success* as being “on top.” As a result, they believe that if they are not on top, they are not successful. If that frustration lasts long enough, they can become disillusioned, bitter, and cynical. If it gets to that point, instead of being a help to themselves and their organization, they become a hindrance.

But what good can people do if they sit on the sidelines?

Consider the case of six men who were featured in *Fortune* magazine in August of 2005. In the article, they are hailed as unsung heroes of the civil rights movement, yet there is no evidence that they ever marched or sat in at a lunch counter. Their contributions—and their battles—occurred in corporate America. They led their way into the executive suite of companies such as Exxon, Phillip Morris, Marriott, and General Foods.

Clifton Wharton, who became the first black CEO of a large company (TIAA-CREF) says, “Gordon Parks has this great expression, ‘choice of weapons.’ In terms of fighting, you always have a choice of weapons. Some of us chose to do our fighting on the inside.”<sup>1</sup>

When Wharton and fellow pioneers Darwin Davis, James Avery, Lee Archer, James “Bud” Ward, and George Lewis entered corporate America in the 1950s and ’60s, what chance did they think they had to become CEO of their organizations: Equitable, Exxon, General Foods, Marriott, and Phillip Morris? Not much! When Avery started with Esso (now Exxon), he couldn’t even use the same restroom or water fountain as other citizens. Yet it was his goal to lead. That desire was part of his first career choice: teaching. And it prompted him to change careers in 1956 when an Esso executive approached him.



“I loved being a teacher,” Avery says. “But if I could wear a shirt and tie and work for a major corporation? Doing that was much more important.”<sup>2</sup> Avery succeeded as a leader despite incredible obstacles and prejudice, and rose to the post of senior vice president. He retired in 1986.

Bud Ward, who retired as senior vice president at Marriott, has a similar story. When he was hired by Bill Marriott, Ward became the hotel industry’s first black vice president. During his twenty years of leadership at Marriott, he opened 350 hotels, helped to develop the Courtyard by Marriott chain, and oversaw the company’s infotech team.

Ward is aware of the impact he made. “It was a two-pronged thing,” he says. “You do the marching and the raising hell and whatnot, but you’ve got to have somebody on the inside to interpret that to the individuals that you’re trying to reach. I saw that as my role.”<sup>3</sup>

What these men—and many others—did has made a lasting impact. In the same issue of *Fortune* was a special section called “The Diversity List.” It profiled the most influential African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans in the country. Most people on the list are CEOs, presidents, chairmen, or founders of their organizations, positions that it would have been more difficult to attain had others not gone before them and led well.

You do not need to be the top dog to make a difference. Leadership is not meant to be an all-or-nothing proposition. If being someplace other than the top has caused you great frustration, please don’t throw in the towel. Why? Because you can make an impact from wherever you are in an organization, even if you face additional obstacles, as these six men did.

Being a leader stuck in the middle brings many challenges. You can learn to navigate them. Becoming an effective 360-Degree Leader requires principles and skills to lead the people above, beside, and below you in the organization. You can learn them.

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

The first place to start is by learning to overcome the challenges that every 360-Degree Leader faces. So turn the page and let’s get started.

## *Section I Review*

### *The Myths of Leading from the Middle of an Organization*

Here is a brief review of the 7 Myths every leader in the middle faces:

- MYTH #1     The Position Myth: “I can't lead if I am not at the top.”
- MYTH #2     The Destination Myth: “When I get to the top, then I'll learn to lead.”
- MYTH #3     The Influence Myth: “If I were on top, then people would follow me.”
- MYTH #4     The Inexperience Myth: “When I get to the top, I'll be in control.”
- MYTH #5     The Freedom Myth: “When I get to the top, I'll no longer be limited.”
- MYTH #6     The Potential Myth: “I can't reach my potential if I'm not the top leader.”
- MYTH #7     The All-or-Nothing Myth: “If I can't get to the top, then I won't try to lead.”

How well are you doing overcoming these seven myths? If you're not sure, take the 360-Degree Leadership assessment offered free of charge to people who have purchased this book. Visit [360DegreeLeader.com](http://360DegreeLeader.com) for more information.

## SECTION II

### THE CHALLENGES 360-DEGREE LEADERS FACE

If you are a leader in the middle of an organization, you don't need me to tell you that you have a challenging job. Many of the middle leaders I meet are frustrated, tense, and sometimes tempted to quit. I hear them say things such as, "It's like banging my head against a brick wall." "No matter how hard I try, I never seem to get anywhere." "I really wonder if it's all worth it."

If you and I were to sit down and talk for a few minutes, I bet you could list at least half a dozen problems you face because you are trying to lead from the middle. Perhaps you even feel you have been struggling to succeed where you are. But did you know that the things that frustrate you also frustrate nearly every other middle leader? Everyone who attempts to lead from the middle of the organization faces common challenges. You are not alone.

As I've mentioned, the best opportunity for helping yourself—and your organization—is to become a 360-Degree Leader. However, before you dive into the principles that 360-Degree Leaders practice to lead up, across, and down, I think you ought to acquaint yourself with the seven most common challenges that leaders in the middle face. Defining and recognizing them will help you to navigate the world of the middle, where you are trying to be a good leader even though you are not *the* leader.

I believe the challenges will resonate with you, and you will find yourself saying, "Right on." And, of course, I've offered some suggestions to help you, since recognizing the challenges is of little value without solutions. Read on so that you can resolve some of these issues and get ready to lead 360 degrees.

## Challenge #1

### THE TENSION CHALLENGE:

#### *The Pressure of Being Caught in the Middle*

##### **THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE TENSION CHALLENGE:**

*Learn to lead despite the restrictions others have  
placed on you.*

One of the toughest things about being a leader in the middle of an organization is that you can't be sure of where you stand. As a leader, you have some power and authority. You can make some decisions. You have access to some resources. You can call the people in your area to action and direct them in their work. At the same time, you also lack power in other areas. And if you overstep your authority, you can get yourself into real trouble.

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