

# Maxwell jc 1998 the 21 irrefutable laws of leadership nashville tn thomas nelson ...

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## **Book Report: 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership by John C. Maxwell**

Publishing.

### Introduction

The book essentially describes the qualities of a true leader with practical insights about how to achieve those qualities in life. Divided into twenty-one chapters, Maxwell compounds his theories and ideas about leadership in the form of a law in each of these chapters. Each chapter includes one or more examples, or 'stories' as Maxwell portrays them, that describe the successes and failures of different leaders in society and the rules they have applied to their own lives in order to achieve those successes. The reader is also given a series of tips and instructions so as to apply the law of leadership in his or her life at the end of each chapter.

Thematically speaking, Maxwell attempts to uncover the leader in every type of person by prompting them to understand how far their own capabilities can stretch as the first step towards leadership. Within this frame, he explains qualities like influence, respect, process and foundation that a leader needs to build in order to progress. The latter part of the book that discusses legacy, vision and sacrifice prompt the individual to grow as a person in order to grow as a leader. Each law in the book is stand-alone and are described as the foundations of leadership which can be learnt and applied. Maxwell stresses that no leader can perfect all the twenty-one laws and this is how he enumerates the importance of nurturing others in the organisation for one to grow as a leader and conquer more of the laws.

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## **Analysis**

The author, John C. Maxwell, comes from a background of pastorship, where he had learnt the art of leadership through his personal experiences.

Maxwell's aim had always been to add value to people's life, which is why he chose to write on the subject of leadership that is relevant to the current corporate-driven culture. Maxwell exemplifies saying that although cultures, traditions and technology changes over time, the laws of leadership have stood the test of time. And this test is merely a barometer of how much a leader cares for his followers and how well he can make himself an example to be followed. The point of view that Maxwell employs is that of an observer, rather than a preacher and he prompts his readers to do the same, constantly asking them to grade and rate themselves and their leadership qualities.

A balanced approach is taken in this regard as Maxwell explains the first law, The Law of the Lid with the example of the McDonalds brothers who have reached the extent of their effectiveness at one point. But the true leader of the enterprise, Maxwell says, is Ray Kroc, who pushed the lid to unbelievable levels making McDonalds a global phenomenon. With this example in mind, the reader finds a natural flow as Maxwell busts the myths of leadership in the following chapter, The Law of Influence, naming management, entrepreneurship, knowledge, pioneering and position as the myths. He emphasises that true leadership is not determined by any one of those qualities. A leader is determined by the influence he has on his followers he says and expostulates this as the true yardstick of leadership. In this regard,

Maxwell says, “ Everyone is a leader because everyone influences someone.”

This point could be described as the crux of the book as many of the laws that follow give insights about how to build that influence (Laws of process, navigation & respect), how to nurture it (Laws of solid ground, magnetism & the inner circle) and what kind of people to influence in order to develop oneself as a leader (Laws of connection, empowerment & the picture), and finally to continue having that influence by building a legacy for oneself (Laws of explosive growth & legacy). Critically speaking, one could say that Maxwell addresses leadership in its most literal sense, as of related to people, devaluating the role of money, progress and even success at some level as factors of leadership. In that sense, the book might be viewed more like a philosophical exploration into human values rather than a practical guide to leadership success. Maxwell designates certain tasks to the reader after he explains each law that are also mostly about evaluating oneself as a person and the people one works with.

Other interesting aspects of the book includes ideas like the Law of Sacrifice which states that there is no gain without sacrifice and that sacrifice is a leader’s daily activity and at no point can a leader expect it to stop, the Law of Victory which says that a true leader will always root for collective victory instead of a personal one, the Law of Priorities which discusses the fact that activity alone does not constitute leadership, but constant prioritising does and the Law of Timing which prompts the reader to develop the quality of timing—of doing the right thing at the right time. Maxwell uses interesting

anecdotes from real life examples for each of his laws, from American football and basketball teams to corporate wizards, American civil war heroes and even universally acclaimed people like Mother Teresa. The stories are inexhaustible and the lessons are powerful, sometimes even indigestible by people who are already practicing leadership and have attained a level of success in it. Maxwell's book does not take such readers lightly, but encourages them to raise the lid at every chapter through a new law.

The kind of insights that Maxwell draws from his examples are truly staggering. In the Law of the Big Mo for example, the author says that a takes a leader to fight the wind and build momentum for the ship, step by step, unlike a dreamer (or optimist) who tries only up to a certain extent and expect the wind to change. In a way, the thesis stands its ground where it says that each law stands alone. But each of the laws also talk about helping people as the only route to helping oneself become a better leader, which leaves a ringing question in any person with high aspirations, ' What happens when everybody turns your back on you?' Aren't people with high and multiplying ideas expected to fit into Maxwell's leadership pattern, ever? If you take a Howard Roark, for example, was he not supposed to have the power to change the world, when in fact he has all the potential to do so (Rand, 1943)?

## **Strengths and weaknesses**

Strengths. The laws of leadership enumerated in the book are distilled to a fine quality, through which any person who wants to evaluate the level of influence he has on other people can measure himself with.

The prose is beautifully written, both the student and a reader will be able to enjoy it, while also benefitting from the number of stories interspersing the theory.

A good leader can make even better use of the book as he will most certainly identify with the qualities of leadership Maxwell puts forth and understand that leadership, like any other skill is a constant learning process.

Weaknesses. Explaining the laws through example or 'story' is a little misleading. There will always be exceptions in the world and the layman knows that, and not always will he identify with someone's example for that reason. A few facts and figures or scientific examples would have made a good addition for professionals.

As explained previously, Maxwell asserts the whole being of a leader with one tag, 'followers'. That may be true, but in today's world of instant communication and exalted technology, how much relevance can a new age reader find in Maxwell's law of conversion?

The worksheets at the end of each chapter talk about grading oneself on a scale of numerous attributes. In real life, there can't be many people who can grade themselves on such a scale accurately, especially when it comes to measuring up against others. For this purpose, Maxwell asks to grade your

followers or teammates as well and think about ways to better their grades. This method only seems to be an ego booster for a person who is dying to lead. Maxwell never really convinces the reader as to what constitutes stalwart judgement capability.

## **Summary and Reflections**

This 1998 book of John C. Maxwell is undoubtedly an inspiring read for any kind of reader. The author himself is clearly a man who practices what he preach which makes his teachings even more relevant for the present day. The 21 laws of leadership explained in the book cover almost every quality a true leader should possess and each of those qualities are to be measured in time as a person who implements them, walks the path. There is a great degree of emphasis laid on self-sacrifice in the book and also about slowing down one's progress intentionally in order to help make it a team win. There are several such doctrines imbibed in the laws with suitable real life examples, which help the reader understand the true values of leadership.

In my personal experience, however, I found one of Maxwell's laws clearly inapplicable in situations of urgency or quick thinking. He does not exactly enumerate how to lose people when they are pulling you down. It is the Law of Buy-In, in which Maxwell states that people buy into a leader rather than the vision. And if they like the leader and not the vision, people change the vision. How is this suitable in the current global scenario when entrepreneurs are popping up in every corner of the world, every second and ideas are being implemented by the speed of light? People change the vision because people do not understand the vision. And of course, a good leader is

supposed to influence them in such a way that they understand it. If not, he has to find the right people. Is it Maxwell's way of saying that a person should start with a small idea and hold the reins forever until it grows into the size of that lightning bolt that struck your head right now? The laws of leadership are invaluable, but the world has grown so much since the book and Maxwell has only revised it once. And yet the wisdom is solid and relevant to the teachings of every great leader. I would like to quote Gandhi in this instance, where he says, "Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony," (Fischer, 2002). The entire content of the book could be summarised into that statement, with the goal being leadership instead of happiness. I would treat it as a sound moral compass for leadership rather than a practical guide for everyday business.

## References

Rand, A. (1943). *The Fountainhead*. New York: Signet.

Fischer, L. (1982). *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*. Dublin: Mentor.