The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership
This web page provides excerpts from John C. Maxwell's book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1998). Not included in these excerpts are numerous stories throughout the book which help illustrate important principles. I strongly recommend you purchase the book from John C. Maxwell's web site, INJOY.

Law #1 - The Law of the Lid
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1. You *can* apply each of the laws. If you're a willing student, you can learn the 21 laws and put them into practice.

2. I focus my time and energy on doing what makes a positive impact in the lives of people.

3. Leadership is leadership, no matter where you go or what you do. Times change. Technology marches forward. Cultures vary from place to place. But the true principles of leadership are constant. Leadership principles stand the test of time.

4. **The laws can be learned.** Some are easier to understand and apply than others, but every one of them can be acquired.

5. **The laws can stand alone.** Each law complements all the others, but you don't need one in order to learn another.

6. **The laws carry consequences with them.** Apply the laws, and people will follow you. Violate or ignore them, and you will not be able to lead others.

7. **These laws are the foundation of leadership.** Once you learn the principles, you have to practice them and apply them to your life.

8. Learn them all and people will gladly follow you.

9. Law #1 - The Law of the Lid. Leadership ability is the lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness.

10. If your leadership rates an eight, then your effectiveness can never be greater than a seven.
11. The higher you want to climb, the more you need leadership. The greater impact you want to make, the greater your influence needs to be.

12. Law #2 - The Law of Influence. The true measure of leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less.

13. You have achieved excellence as a leader when people will follow you everywhere if only out of curiosity. - Colin Powell

14. True leadership cannot be awarded, appointed, or assigned. It comes only from influence, and that can't be mandated. It must be earned.

15. Management versus Leadership: The main difference between the two is that leadership is about influencing people to follow, while management focuses on maintaining systems and processes.

16. IQ doesn't necessarily equate to leadership.

17. To be a leader, a person has to not only be out front, but also have people intentionally coming behind him, following his lead, and acting on his vision.

18. It's not the position that makes the leader; it's the leader that makes the position. - Stanley Hufity

19. The very essence of all power to influence lies in getting the other person to participate. - Harry A. Overstreet

20. Followers in voluntary organizations cannot be forced to get on board. If the leader has no influence with them, then they won't follow.

21. If they can get people to follow them while they're serving at the Red Cross, a United Way shelter, or their local church, then you know that they really do have influence - and leadership ability.

22. He who thinks he leads, but has no followers, is only taking a walk. If you can't influence others, they won't follow you. And if they won't follow, you're not a leader.

23. Leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less.

24. Law #3 - The Law of Process. Leadership develops daily, not in a day.

25. What matters most is what you do day by day over the long haul.

26. If you continually invest in your leadership development, letting your "assets" compound, the inevitable result is growth over time.

27. The ability to lead is really a collection of skills, nearly all of which can be learned and improved.

28. Leadership is complicated. It has many facets: respect, experience, emotional strength, people skills, discipline, vision, momentum, timing - the list goes on.

29. Successful leaders are learners. And the learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline and perseverance.

30. The secret of a success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes. - Benjamin Disraeli

31. Champions don't become champions in the ring - they are merely recognized there.
32. Leadership doesn't develop in a day. It takes a lifetime.

33. Law #4 - The Law of Navigation. Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course.

34. Leaders who navigate do even more than control the direction in which they and their people travel. They see the whole trip in their minds before they leave the dock. They have a vision for their destination, they understand what it will take to get there, they know who they'll need on the team to be successful, and they recognize the obstacles long before they appear on the horizon.

35. A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others do. - Leroy Eims

36. Navigators draw on past experience. If you fail to learn from your mistakes, you're going to fail again and again.

37. Navigators listen to what others have to say. Top-notch navigators gather information from many sources.

38. Navigators examine the conditions before making commitments.

39. Navigators make sure their conclusions represent both faith and fact.

40. If you can't confidently make the trip in your mind, you're not going to be able to take it in real life. On the other hand, you also have to be able to see the facts realistically.

41. It's difficult balancing optimism and realism, intuition and planning, faith and fact. But that's what it takes to be effective as a navigating leader.

42. If the leader can't navigate the people through rough waters, he is liable to sink the ship.

43. **P** redetermine a course of action.
   
   **L** ay out your goals.
   
   **A** djust your priorities.
   
   **N** otify key personnel.
   
   **A** llow time for acceptance.
   
   **H** ead into action.
   
   **E** xpect problems.
   
   **A** lways point to the successes.
   
   **D** aily review your plan.

44. Major barriers to successful planning are fear of change, ignorance, uncertainty about the future, and lack of imagination.

45. The secret to the law of navigation is preparation.

46. I continually kept the vision in front of the people by giving them good news reports to acknowledge our successes.
47. When you prepare well, you convey confidence and trust to the people.

48. It's not the size of the project that determines its acceptance, support, and success. It's the size of the leader.

49. Law #5 - The Law of E. F. Hutton. When the real leader speaks, people listen.

50. The **real** leader holds the power, not just the position.

51. Being in power is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't. - Margaret Thatcher

52. If you see a disparity between who's leading the meeting and who's leading the people, then the person running the meeting is not the real leader.

53. The real test of leadership isn't where you start out. It's where you end up.

54. The proof of leadership is found in the followers.

55. An example of a real leader is Billy Graham. Every president of the United States since Harry Truman has sought his leadership and wise counsel.

56. Seven key areas reveal themselves in leader's lives that cause them to step forward as leaders:
   a. Character - who they are.
   b. Relationships - who they know.
   c. Knowledge - what they know.
   d. Intuition - what they feel.
   e. Experience - where they've been.
   f. Past Success - what they've done.
   g. Ability - what they can do.

57. People listen to what someone has to say not necessarily because of the truth being communicated in the message, but because of their respect for the speaker.

58. How do people react when you communicate? When you speak, do people listen - I mean **really** listen? Or do they wait to hear what someone else has to say before they act?

59. Law #6 - The Law of Solid Ground. Trust is the foundation of leadership.

60. Your people know when you make mistakes.

61. When it comes to leadership, you just can't take shortcuts, no matter how long you've been leading your people.

62. Each time you make a good leadership decision, it puts change into your pocket. Each time you make a poor one, you have to pay out some of your change to your people. When you're out of change, you're out as the leader.
63. Trust is the foundation of leadership. To build trust, a leader must exemplify these qualities: competence, connection, and character.

64. They won't trust someone who has slips in character.

65. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf said, "Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy."

66. Character makes trust possible. And trust makes leadership possible. That is the law of solid ground.

67. If your people don't know what to expect from you as a leader, at some point they won't look to you for leadership.

68. John Morley, said, "No man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character."

69. Craig Weatherup said, "You don't build trust by talking about it. You build it by achieving results, always with integrity and in a manner that shows real personal regard for the people with whom you work." When a leader's character is strong, people trust him, and they trust in his ability to release their potential.

70. How do leaders earn respect? By making sound decisions, admitting their mistakes, and putting what's best for their followers and the organization ahead of their personal agendas.

71. J. R. Miller, said, "The only thing that walks back from the tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man..."

72. When a leader breaks trust, he forfeits his ability to lead.

73. No leader can break trust with his people and expect to keep influencing them. Trust is the foundation of leadership. Violate the law of solid ground, and you're through as a leader.

74. Law #7 - The Law of Respect. People naturally follow leaders stronger than themselves.

75. When people respect someone as a person, they admire her. When they respect her as a friend, they love her. When they respect her as a leader, they follow her.

76. People naturally follow leaders stronger than themselves.

77. The less skilled follow the more highly skilled and gifted.

78. The more leadership ability a person has, the more quickly he recognizes leadership - or its lack - in others.

79. The leader must know, must know he knows, and must be able to make it abundantly clear to those about him that he knows. - Clarence B. Randall

80. The greatest test of respect comes when a leader creates major change in an organization.

81. Law #8 - The Law of Intuition. Leaders evaluate everything with a leadership bias.

82. The law of intuition is based on facts plus instinct and other intangible factors.

83. A leader has to read the situation and know instinctively what play to call.
84. U.S. Army General H. Norman Schwarzkopf was assigned commands that others avoided. Time after
time he was able to turn the situations around as a result of his exceptional leadership intuition and ability to
act.

85. Schwarzkopf's intuition told him that his people needed a goal to galvanize them.

86. Natural ability and learned skills create an informed intuition that makes leadership issues jump out at
leaders.

87. Successful leaders see every situation in terms of available resources: money, raw materials, technology,
and most important, people. They never forget that people are their greatest asset.

88. Intuitive leaders can sense what's happening among people and almost instantly know their hopes, fears,
and concerns.

89. Good leaders develop the ability to read themselves - their strengths, weaknesses, and current state of
mind.

90. Who you are dictates what you see.

91. The ability to think like a leader is informed intuition.

92. Whenever leaders find themselves facing a problem, they automatically measure it - and begin solving it -
using the Law of Intuition.

93. Improvement is impossible without a change in leadership.

94. Leadership is really more art than science.

95. Law #9 - The Law of Magnetism. Who you are is who you attract.

96. Who you get is not determined by what you want. It's determined by
who you are.

97. Good leaders know that one secret to success is to staff their weaknesses.

98. Teams cannot be anything but an extension of the coach's personality.

99. If you think your people are negative, then you better check your attitude.

100. People tend to attract others of roughly the same age.

101. Whatever character you possess you will likely find in the people who follow you.

102. The better leader you are, the better leaders you will attract. If you think people you attract could be
better, then it's time for you to improve yourself.

103. Law #10 - The Law of Connection. Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand.

104. You can't move people to action unless you first move them with emotion.

105. The stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the follower will want to
help the leader.
106. When a leader has done the work to connect with his people, you can see it in the way the organization functions. Among employees there are incredible loyalty and a strong work ethic. The vision of the leader becomes the aspiration of the people. The impact is incredible.

107. Always touch a person's heart before you ask him for a hand.

108. Law #11 - The Law of the Inner Circle. A leader's potential is determined by those closest to him. If those people are strong, then the leader can make a huge impact. If they are weak, he can't.

109. When you have the right staff, potential skyrockets.

110. There are no lone ranger leaders. Think about it: If you're alone, you're not leading anybody, are you?

111. The leader finds greatness in the group, and he or she helps the members find it in themselves.

112. Under the best circumstances, a leader should try to raise up people for his inner circle from within his organization.

113. You should try to bring five types of people into your inner circle. All of them can add tremendous value to you and your organization.

   a. Potential value - those who raise up themselves.
   b. Positive value - those who raise morale in the organization.
   c. Personal value - those who raise up the leader.
      (1). It's lonely at the top, so you'd better take someone with you.
   d. Production value - those who raise up others.
   e. Proven value - those who raise up people who raise up other people.
      (1). The greatest value to any leader is someone who can raise up other leaders.

114. Hire the best staff you can find, develop them as much as you can, and hand off everything you possibly can to them.

115. Lee Iacocca says that success comes not from what you know, but from who you know and how you present yourself to each of those people.

116. Law #12 - The Law of Empowerment. Only secure leaders give power to others.

117. The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it. - Theodore Roosevelt

118. If you want to be successful as a leader, you have to be an empowerer.

119. Only empowered people can reach their potential.

120. The people's capacity to achieve is determined by their leader's ability to empower.

121. Barriers to empowerment:

   a. Desire for job security.
      (1). The number one enemy of empowerment is the desire for job security. The only way to make yourself indispensable is to make yourself dispensable.
   b. Resistance to change.
1. Empowerment brings constant change because it encourages people to grow and innovate. Change is the price of progress.

c. Lack of self-worth.

122. Only secure leaders are able to give themselves away.

123. I believe the greatest things happen only when you give others the credit.

124. Admiral James B. Stockdale declared, "Leadership must be based on goodwill... It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers...What we need for leaders are men of heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs....great leaders gain authority by giving it away."

125. To push people down, you have to go down with them.

126. Even when his generals performed poorly, Lincoln took the blame. Lincoln expert Donald T. Phillips acknowledged, "Throughout the war Lincoln continued to accept public responsibility for battles lost or opportunities missed."

127. A key to empowering others is high belief in people.

128. The truth is that empowerment is powerful - not only for the person being developed, but also for the mentor. Enlarging others makes you larger.

129. Law #13 - The Law of Reproduction. It takes a leader to raise up a leader.

130. Only leaders are capable of developing other leaders. People cannot give to others what they themselves do not possess. Followers simply cannot develop leaders.

131. Spend time with the best leaders you can find.

132. Learn leadership from people in many professions. No matter what the profession, the principles of leadership remain the same.

133. The only way you will be able to develop other leaders is to become a better leader yourself.

134. See the big picture. Every effective leadership mentor makes the development of leaders one of his highest priorities in life.

135. If you first develop your leadership qualities, you will be capable of attracting people with leadership potential.

136. Create an eagle environment where the leader casts a vision, offers incentives, encourages creativity, allows risks, and provides accountability.

137. How was General Electric able to produce so many outstanding leaders? First, leadership development is one of the company's highest priorities. It spends more than $500 million a year on training and develops leaders at its own institute in Crotonville, often called "the Harvard of corporate America." Even more important than that is the fact that the company is run by a great leader, Jack Welch.

138. Law #14 - The Law of Buy-In. People buy into the leader, then the vision.

139. The most remarkable thing about Gandhi isn't that he became their leader, but that he was able to change the people's vision for obtaining freedom.
140. Gandhi challenged the people to meet oppression with peaceful disobedience and noncooperation. Because the people had come to buy into him as their leader, they embraced his vision.

141. The leader finds the dream and then the people. The people find the leader, and then the dream.

142. People don't at first follow worthy causes. They follow worthy leaders who promote worthwhile causes. People buy into the leader first, then the leader's vision.

143. People buy Nike shoes because they have bought into Michael Jordan, not necessarily because of the quality of the shoes.

144. Once people have bought into someone, they are willing to give his vision a chance. People want to go along with people they get along with.

145. You cannot separate the leader from the cause he promotes. It cannot be done, no matter how hard you try.

146. When followers don't like the leader or the vision, they look for another leader.

147. When followers don't like the leader but they do like the vision, they still look for another leader.

148. When followers like the leader but not the vision, they change the vision.

149. When followers like the leader and the vision, they will get behind both.

150. As a leader, having a great vision and a worthy cause is not enough to get people to follow you. First you have to become a better leader; you must get your people to buy into you.

151. As a leader, you don't earn any points for failing in a noble cause. You don't get credit for being "right." Your success is measured by your ability to actually take the people where they need to go. But you can do that only if the people first buy into you as a leader.

152. Law #15 - The Law of Victory. Leaders find a way for the team a win.

153. I think that victorious leaders share an inability to accept defeat. The alternative to winning seems totally unacceptable to them, so they figure out what must be done to achieve victory, and then they go after it with everything at their disposal.

154. Winston Churchill said, "You ask, What is our aim? I answer in one word: Victory - victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

155. Not even an Adolf Hitler and the army of the Third Reich could stand against two leaders (Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill) dedicated to the law of victory.

156. When the pressure is on, great leaders are at their best. Whatever is inside them comes to the surface and works for or against them.

157. Michael Jordan is not dwelling on his past mistakes. What's important to him is what he can do right now to lead his team to victory.

158. Flashy individual play doesn't always bring victory. What's needed more than anything else is leadership.

159. Victory is possible as long as you have three components:
a. Unity of vision.

b. Diversity of skills.

(1). Organizations require diverse talents to succeed, each player taking his part.

c. A leader dedicated to victory and raising players to their potential.

(1). Lou Holtz said, "You've got to have great athletes to win, I don't care who the coach is. You can't win without good athletes, but you can lose with them. This is where coaching makes the difference."

160. Leaders who practice the law of victory believe that anything less than success is unacceptable. And they have no Plan B. That keeps them fighting.

161. Law #16 - The Law of the Big Mo. Momentum is a leader's best friend.

162. In the movie *Stand and Deliver*, Escalante thought of quitting almost daily. But his passion for teaching and his dedication to improving the lives of his students wouldn't allow him to give up.

163. Escalante recognized that he could succeed only if his students were effectively inspired and properly motivated. All along the way, he modeled hard work, dedication to excellence, and what he called *ganas* - desire.

164. Leaders always find a way to make things happen.

165. It takes a leader to create momentum. Followers catch it. But creating it requires someone who can motivate others, not who needs to be motivated.

166. If you can't make some heat, get out of the kitchen.

167. Momentum really is a leader's best friend.

168. When leader have momentum on their side, people think they're geniuses. They look past shortcomings. They forget about the mistakes the leaders have made. Momentum changes people's perspective of leaders.

169. With enough momentum, nearly any kind of change is possible.

170. Momentum puts victory within reach.

171. Law #17 - The Law of Priorities. Leaders understand that activity is not necessarily accomplishment.

172. A leader is the one who climbs the tallest tree, surveys the entire situation, and yells, 'Wrong jungle!' - Stephen Covey

173. For the last ten years, I've used two guidelines to help me measure my activity and determine my priorities. The first is the Pareto Principle. If you focus your attention on the activities that rank in the top 20 percent in terms of importance, you will have an 80 percent return on your effort. The second guideline is the three Rs. My three Rs are requirement, return, and reward.

174. There are many things that will catch my eye, but there are only a few things that will catch my heart. - Tim Redmond
175. To be effective, leaders must order their lives according to these three questions:
   
a. What is required?
   (1). Anything required that's not necessary for you to do personally should be delegated or eliminated.

   b. What gives the greatest return?
   (1). As a leader, you should spend most of your time working in your areas of greatest strength.

   c. What brings the greatest reward?
   (1). Nothing energizes a person the way passion does.

176. The best leaders seem to be able to get the law of priorities to work for them by satisfying multiple priorities with each activity.

177. John Wooden never scouted opposing teams. Instead, he focused on getting his players to reach their potential. It was never his goal to win championships or even to beat the other team. His desire was to get each person to play to his potential and to put the best possible team on the floor.

178. Jack Welch of GE knew that the greatest success comes only when you focus your people on what really matters.

179. Law #18 - The Law of Sacrifice. A leader must give up to go up.

180. Successful leaders have to maintain an attitude of sacrifice in order to turn around an organization. They have to be willing to do what it takes to go to the next level.

181. The law of sacrifice maintains that one sacrifice seldom brings success.

182. Lee Iacocca reduced his own salary to one dollar a year. At the time he said, "Leadership means setting an example. When you find yourself in a position of leadership, people follow your every move."

183. Sacrifice is a constant in leadership. It is an ongoing process, not a one-time payment.

184. Anytime you know that the step is right, don't hesitate to make a sacrifice.

185. Leader who want to rise have to do more than take an occasional cut in pay. They have to give up their rights. As my friend Gerald Brooks says, "When you become a leader, you lose the right to think about yourself."

186. Effective leaders sacrifice much that is good in order to dedicate themselves to what is best.

187. Digital Chairman and Chief Executive Robert Palmer said, "...If you want a management job, then you have to accept the responsibility and accountability that goes with it."

188. If leaders have to give up to go up, then they have to give up even more to stay up.

189. The only way to stay up is to give up even more. Leadership success requires continual change, improvement, and sacrifice.

190. Philosopher-poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain, you lose something."

191. The law of sacrifice demands that the greater the leader, the more he must give up.
192. Martin Luther King Jr., said "...I just want to do God's will."

193. There is no success without sacrifice.

194. Law #19 - The Law of Timing. When to lead is as important as what to do and where to go.

195. Every time a leader makes a move, there are really only four outcomes that can result:
   a. The wrong action at the wrong time leads to disaster.
   b. The right action at the wrong time brings resistance.
   c. The wrong action at the right time is a mistake.
   d. The right action at the right time results in success.

196. If a leader repeatedly shows poor judgment, even in little things, people start to think that having him as the leader is the real mistake.

197. Winston Churchill said, "There comes a special moment in everyone's life, a moment for which that person was born. That special opportunity, when he seizes it, will fulfill his mission - a mission for which he is uniquely qualified. In that moment, he finds greatness. It is his finest hour."

198. Reading a situation and knowing what to do are not enough to make you succeed in leadership. Only the right action at the right time will bring success. Anything else exacts a high price.

199. Law #20 - The Law of Explosive Growth. To add growth, lead followers – to multiply, lead leaders.

200. It's my job to build the people who are going to build the company.

201. Wade Oney of Papa John's pizza said, "The reason we're successful in the marketplace is our focus on quality and our desire to keep things simple. The reason we're successful as a company is our good people." They don't plan to stop growing until they are the largest seller of pizza in the world. "The challenge now," explains Oney, "is developing the next leaders....The key is to develop leaders. You do that by building up people."

202. Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth, because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader's followers.

203. The better the leaders you develop, the greater the quality and quantity of followers.

204. To go to the highest level, you have to develop leaders of leaders. Dale Galloway said, "...Not only do I want to make leaders, but I want to make leaders of leaders. And then leaders of leaders of leaders."

205. Leaders who develop leaders:
   a. Want to be succeeded.
   b. Focus on strengths.
   c. Develop the top 20 percent.
   d. Treat their leaders as individuals for impact.
206. Leadership development isn't an add-water-and-stir proposition. It takes time, energy, and resources.

207. Law #21 - The Law of Legacy. A leader's lasting value is measured by succession.

208. Few chief executives of companies today develop strong leaders and groom them to take over the organization.

209. Leadership is one of the things you cannot delegate. You either exercise it, or you abdicate it. - Robert Goizueta

210. I believe there is a third choice for leadership: You pass it on to your successor.

211. The ones who do leave a legacy of succession for their organizations do the following:

    a. Lead the organization with a "long view"
    b. Create a leadership culture.
    c. Pay the price today to assure success tomorrow.

        (1). There is no success without sacrifice. Any leader who wants to help his organization must be willing to pay that price to ensure lasting success.
    d. Value team leadership above individual leadership.

        (1). No matter how good he is, no leader can do it all alone. The larger the organization, the stronger, larger, and deeper the team of leaders needs to be.
    e. Walk away from the organization with integrity.

        (1). When it's a leader's time to leave the organization, he has got to be willing to walk away and let his successor do his own thing.

212. Just as in sports a coach needs a team of good players to win, an organization needs a team of good leaders to succeed.

213. Max Dupree, author of Leadership Is an Art, declared, "Succession is one of the key responsibilities of leaders."

214. A legacy is created only when a person puts his organization into the position to do great things without him.

215. Chris Musgrove says, "Success is not measured by what you're leaving to, but by what you are leaving behind."
216. Your ability as a leader will not be judged by what you achieved personally or even by what your team accomplished during your tenure. You will be judged by how well your people and your organization did after you were gone.

217. Any endeavor you can undertake that involves other people will live or die depending on the leadership.
   a. Personnel determine the potential of the organization.
   b. Relationships determine the morale of the organization.
   c. Structure determines the size of the organization.
   d. Vision determines the direction of the organization.
   e. Leadership determines the success of the organization.

218. Pursue your dreams. Desire excellence. Become the person you were created to be. And accomplish all that you were put on this earth to do. Leadership will help you do that. Learn to lead - not just for yourself, but for the people who follow behind you.

219. Don't forget to take others with you to be the leaders of tomorrow.

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