

# **Let Common Sense Be Your Guide to Leading**

I was invited to speak at an international life-coaching convention a few years ago, and asked the person who had contacted me by phone, “What do you do?”

She said, “We certify corporate coaches and life coaches.”

I was curious so I asked her, “What do you personally do?”

She said, “I’m a certified life and corporate coach.”

Her voice and enthusiasm had given me the impression that she was quite young, so I asked her how old she was. “I’m 21,” she said.

That fact alone gave me some reservations about this young woman’s organization. After all, experience—both in the workplace and life in general—is crucial to coaching. Before declining, I decided to get a second opinion. I called a friend of mine who was a corporate executive and I asked, “What are some criteria you use to hire life coaches and corporate coaches?”

He laughed and he said, “Their hair has to be grayer than mine.”

That made the decision for me. There are so many organizations that make money off coaching certification programs without setting clear standards for the people they claim to serve. They plant an idea in the minds of these young people, leading them to believe they can be successful when they’re not really qualified to coach. That’s not to say that someday they won’t have enough experience under their belts to be effective coaches, but certifying recent college grads who have spent

limited time in any professional situation sends the wrong message about what coaching entails.

I think leadership falls into that same category. There are obviously many types of leadership: the inherited leadership, especially in family-owned businesses; corporate leadership, where board members talk about who is next in line to be CEO or chairman; and there are top performers, especially in sales where it's easy to set up a leaderboard and compare numbers. In most cases when we talk about leadership, we're thinking about people in the context of being the next leaders of the company. But this perspective has some serious drawbacks.

For example, many times in sales-oriented companies it can really hurt the sales force when the person with the best sales numbers is promoted to a management position. I've known a lot of salespeople who have told me that they hope they don't get promoted to sales manager because they love selling. Well, the next thing you know they're promoted to manager and don't sell anymore. The problem is they're not management people—not *coaches*. As salespeople, they may have shown true leadership and carried themselves in such a way that it motivated other people. Top-performing salespeople have a few things in common: They talk to people. They consult with their colleagues. They create a positive environment for sales. But when you make those people managers, you take them out of the sales force, which hurts the company in two ways. First, they are no longer in a position where they sell well, stay happy, and naturally emerge as leaders. Second, they are unhappy and often ill equipped to manage the team.

It's always been my rule of thumb to tell people in the corporate world that it's up to the executives to create an environment and *let the leaders lead*.

One night at midnight my phone rang. The caller was a general manager of a Major League Baseball team; it was the first time in 45 years I had been called by a general manager. Between that and the

late hour, I figured his team must be working through something pretty serious. He said, “We have a great kid. I really like him, he’s struggling. He needs to talk to you.”

I said, “Well, I will call him first thing in the morning.”

The general manager said, “No, he’ll be in his room at 12:15.”

So I called him just after midnight and we talked till 2:00 AM. The issue was that he wanted to be a leader on the team. He was a verbal person and he talked a lot to players. He also spent a lot of time trying to motivate other people, which, unfortunately, often involved him yelling at them.

My point was very simple. I said, “Leaders show leadership through performance. If you go out and be who you are and play the best you can play every single day and do what *you* can do every single day to help the team win, you’re going to be recognized as the leader.” It was another matter of actions speaking louder than words.

Well, the next year he won the Silver Slugger Award and made the All-Star team. Just as important to him, he was considered a leader on the team. His teammates noticed his hard work and began to look to him for motivation. But then the team let him get away as a free agent, which left them with no leadership at all.

I’ve always thought it’s interesting to watch a team perform after the leaders are gone. That’s when you have so many people trying to establish themselves as a leader, which can sometimes be a very, very negative direction.

I worked with one corporation at three different levels of management: sales, middle management, and executive. It was an interesting environment because it was a growing company, there was a lot of room for growth, and they tried to promote from within. During my time working with the company, I had many meetings with salespeople and several of them asked me, “Can you talk to the vice president for sales and tell him not to promote me to regional sales manager?”

In a lot of different corporate environments, we get so obsessed with performance numbers that we don't look beyond those when considering leadership positions. Your best leaders may not be your top performers but rather the people who enable top performers to achieve high levels. You can detect this in a number of ways, but none of them are as easy as tracking sales data.

Leaders need to be especially involved with the development of *chemistry* in the corporate environment. This intangible factor is often overlooked by those who are involved with numbers or obsessed with profit. I have seen firsthand, both in the corporate environment and in sports environments, that chemistry is one of those things that you never miss until it's gone.

Many years ago I worked with a team that was on a ten-game winning streak and a reporter asked one of the athletes, "To what do you attribute this streak?"

He said, "It's because we've been playing well, we hit the ball well, we score a lot of runs."

"What about chemistry?" the reporter asked.

And the athlete said, "Chemistry is way overplayed. That's just something people like to talk about."

Well, about a month later we went on an eight-game losing streak. The same athlete faced the same reporter, who asked, "To what do you attribute the losing streak?"

"Well," the player said, "I don't know. Man, we've lost our chemistry."

Chemistry, that abstract element that maintains synergy and keeps things running well, is something we don't talk about a lot, but it has everything to do with team performance. As in the sports world, if we don't operate as a team in the corporate world, then we're just developing individual performers. Even if they do everything they can, we as an organization will never reach the levels we need to reach because it's impossible for individuals to get there on their own.

Everybody needs to be a part of a team—and leaders are the ones who help people recognize that.

We'll talk about chemistry and a positive work environment in Chapter 7. All you need to know right now is that if you have a negative environment, you're not going to succeed, no matter what kind of talent you have. However, if you have a positive environment, you increase your probability for success because you'll have the right chemistry keeping things together.

Everything I talk about in this book hinges on the fact that talent overrides everything else. I don't care how good you feel about your leadership qualities. If you don't have talent, you can't play. It's a hard fact. I've been in corporate environments where people with the talent to talk and schmooze the right people have, in fact, been promoted up through companies, but they weren't successful over the long term as executives because they didn't have the talent to play.

The first thing that you need to examine if you have aspirations of being a leader is that it takes not only knowledge but also time, communication skills, and personality traits—all of which lend themselves to leadership. You need to decide who you want to be and what you want to do with your life, both in the corporate environment and personally. Too many times leaders are people who have been assigned a label, but they're not true leaders in the corporate environment. The true leaders, as I said before, are within the workforce, in every department. Leaders are very team oriented, but they can also make decisions. They are the people who are recognized—often by their peers—for what they do to help the group succeed.

One thing to be careful of, if you are an aspiring leader, is to examine your personality to ensure you have the traits necessary to succeed in a leadership position. Some people, no matter how badly they want to be in charge, are not cut out to be true leaders who inspire those around them. As for people who are natural followers, that's fine,

too. You don't have to be a leader to be successful. Some people are at their best when they are part of a supportive environment but do not have to make key decisions.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the subject of personality, something that you don't see in many leadership books. Most of the industry relies on tests and evaluations to determine who should be given a leader label, but these methods are often superficial and I don't think they help us get a read on who people really are. This sets unattainable expectations because we want a person to become someone who matches the label we've assigned. That doesn't often work out.

For example, I spoke at a corporate environment where, before I arrived, the organizers had given a personality inventory and categorized people into four boxes. I don't recall what the boxes were exactly—introverts, extroverts, leaders, and followers—but they assigned each personality type a color (red, yellow, green, and blue). Then, they bought T-shirts in the colors of the four categories for the conference attendees to wear. This was meant to facilitate better communication in the company.

When I arrived at the meeting, everybody was wearing a T-shirt in one of the four identifying colors. The interesting thing to me was the fact that all the yellow shirts sat in one section, all green shirts in another, and so on. Instead of improving communication, they had pigeonholed people into categories. It turned out that everyone felt more comfortable talking to the people wearing the same color T-shirt.

There are many tests that categorize people into different slots, but I don't think they are fair and I think you lose some potential leaders in the process. You stifle the productivity of a company and shut down individual creativity. Even worse, you establish a relationship dynamic instead of letting one emerge through natural chemistry.

Unlike other leadership guides, this book is based on experience and observation instead of theory. In my 45 years of experience as a sports psychologist and consultant, I have talked to people at every

level in both the corporate and athletics worlds. It might surprise you that the leadership skills in those two arenas are not very different.

Some of the greatest athletes I've ever worked with were some of the worst leaders that I've ever been around. Many times you can look at sports teams and find that your greatest performers are your worst coaches. I can think of several managers in baseball who were great players but couldn't manage a young team because everything had come to them so easily when they played.

Don't mistake a title—whether it's coach or CEO—for leadership. Positions slot people into an organizational chart; that's all. Real leadership is showing people around you that you're playing to win. Many, many companies fail to recognize the leaders working throughout their organization and, as a result, they will never achieve the levels of success that they should.

One company I consulted with had drastically reduced headcount to save money. They had fired 50,000 people and had 40,000 left. In one meeting, my big question to the executives was, "What are you going to do for the people who are left? You've obviously fired a lot of leadership people and a lot of good folks and the people who are still here are going to have a tough time."

One corporate vice president stood up and said, "If we keep them busy, they won't complain."

I thought it was the saddest comment I'd heard in ages from a corporate executive. My thoughts were that more than half the staff is gone, at least 10,000 of the people left behind are going to miss their friends and former colleagues, and their performance will go down because they won't feel as happy or engaged. Another 10,000 to 20,000 of the remaining staff will wonder if they're going to be next, and their performance will go down because they will try to be invisible. In fact, I was on a flight with a management person from that company, and she described exactly how the recent layoffs were affecting her work.

I recognized the letterhead she was using, so I asked her if she worked for the company. She said that she was the regional marketing manager.

I asked, "What do you do?"

"Nothing," she said. "Haven't you read the papers? I'm laying low because I don't want them to see me or I may be next."

Now, my first thought was she's supposed to be leading this marketing division, but she's not performing because she's paranoid about losing her job. Her fear filters down to all the people who are working for her, and they stop performing. Her department probably wasn't the only one where things had ground to a halt, so the company was setting itself up for collapse, at least that was my perception.

Instead of doing something to make the transition easier for the people they kept on staff, the company hired an outside firm to create a slogan for the people who were left. They printed it on T-shirts and caps and buttons. The slogan was: I'm a Survivor. I had never heard anything so ridiculous in my life. I went to the corporate president and said, "You know, if you want to win and you want to be a strong company, why would you label 40,000 people as survivors?"

"Well, they still have jobs."

I said, "That's not the important thing. Anybody can have a job. You need to give them some self-worth by telling them they're *winners*. They're the people that you think will take this organization to the next level."

Eventually performance dropped so far that the company was forced to merge with another company. I've never forgotten that example, and it happens in too many companies.

Another company I worked with was struggling with a different kind of transition. They brought in a new person to be CEO and chairman. He was from a very productive corporate environment, one of the top companies in the world, and what happened was very



interesting. The company was a service-oriented company, a one-stop shop where you could get almost anything. In their brick-and-mortar stores, you could always find somebody to help you who also had tremendous knowledge of the type of equipment you needed. As a result, the customer service was tremendous.

The first thing the new CEO did was fire those experienced people and hire more part-time and younger workers who knew nothing about the products. Customer service went downhill drastically and the company's main competitor absolutely exploded on the scene. It wasn't until that CEO was removed and replaced that the company was saved. Otherwise they would have gone out of business.

Now the company's doing well again. Why? Because they have a CEO who understands that their leadership is in the individual stores. Their leadership consists of the people who work up and down the aisles. Their leadership, which makes the company much more profitable, is the people who have a range of experience that they bring to the environment, and they let the players play.

The professional baseball team I was with for many years, which was very successful, set a record for the number of consecutive division titles. I worshiped the manager, but I've often said the manager was not the leader. The manager was so important because he let the players lead.

While I was working with that team, a well-known motivational speaker came to a game one day and he asked the manager, "How do you motivate your players?"

The manager said, "I put their names on the lineup card and I let them play."

"There has to be more to it than that."

"No. I just put their names on the lineup card and I let them play."

And he never, in 16 years when I was around him, never made one comment about any player in the press. All of his conversations were private, held with players directly. He put their names on the lineup

card and he let them play. We were fortunate enough to have two or three leadership-type people on the team and the manager let them lead. He never called them leaders, and he never gave them a label. He just let them lead, and he let them play.

And I think that's what we're looking for when we talk about leadership. What are the things that really enable you to lead if you decide you want to? Some people may decide they don't want to lead—they may be great followers. I like to think it's about balance. Leaders are not only the people who want to be out front in a visible leadership position all the time. Leaders need to know when to follow; when to let colleagues spread their wings and fly.

I think leadership is an interesting topic because everybody throws the word around. It's a label like "coach." People seem to think that's the hottest and greatest label around these days. But even as everybody tosses these terms around, I don't think they really understand what leadership is.

I gave a lunchtime speech for a major pharmaceutical company. They had a three-hour meeting before the lunch, and invited me to sit in because they were talking about coaching and thought I'd be interested. I took them up on their offer and it really influenced the talk I gave at lunchtime. My first comment when I got up to speak was, "I sat here for three hours in a 'coaching meeting,' and I never heard one thing that dealt with coaching. I heard a lot about training, but not coaching."

Coaching is a very popular term. People like it. People want to be *coached* and they want to be *coaches*, so they use that term, even if what they're really doing is *training*. Training is teaching people basic skills to perform a given task. Coaching is tweaking those skills once a person knows how to play. Coaching is the next level. And it's definitely not the same as leadership.

Unlike coaching, leadership is something that's very fluid. Some people work three, four, or five years before they're respected as

leaders. Other people come in and, because of the way they carry themselves, their personality traits, or their ability to communicate, they are seen as leaders from their first day. In many cases that is unfair, but it happens.

Sometimes a label or an old offhand comment about a person overpowers what they actually say and do. For example, one team I worked with had a great young pitcher who was 24 years old. He threw 96 miles an hour. An average fastball is about 89, so he had a lot of talent. But his body language was so negative and aggressive that his teammates didn't like to play behind him in a defensive role. He'd prance around the mound or stare down a guy if he missed a ball. He just wasn't a fun person to be around, so after a period of time we traded him to another team.

That led to an interesting development. The next year we were playing that pitcher's new team in our stadium and I was out by the batting cage. The manager of the other team came over and said, "Dr. Jack, I have a serious question. We've got this pitcher who throws 96, is an amazing talent, but he's driving me nuts. His body language is bad. Players don't like him. He's a disruption in the dressing room, and I don't know what to do about it. I notice that you guys had him last year. What did you do?"

"We traded him to you."

We had a good laugh and that team kept him one more month before trading him to a third team. They kept him one month and then he was released. His career was over at 26 years old because of his body language; not because of his lack of knowledge, not because of his lack of skill, not because of his lack of ability to perform, but his body language.

So it's important to understand the importance of a leader's body language. If you're not the kind of person who likes to pay attention to those kinds of details, then you might not want to be a leader.

Now we're going to look at two different aspects of leadership: assets and liabilities. I think these elements shape everything people do. The assets are the things that make you who you are and make you good at what you do, both personally and professionally. The liabilities are the things that you would like to do better, areas in which you don't feel as competent as you should; in short, those things about yourself that drive you nuts. Everybody has both. I use them with every single person in every single program I do. Whether it's a corporate coaching program, a sales program, or a sport environment, everybody lists their assets and liabilities.

Now, we'll get into detail about those because I think they form the foundation of who we are, what we can or cannot do. In other words, if you have certain expectations of yourself, if others have expectations of you, or if you set short- and long-term goals, your assets and liabilities will determine how you meet them. Before we set expectations and goals, how many of us examine our assets and liabilities? If we don't take into consideration our assets and liabilities, we get ourselves in a bind because we may not be able to do what we set out to. Some people have a liability that hangs over their heads. Those people need to examine that first to figure out how to eliminate it, convert it to an asset, or learn to live with it.

Next, we'll talk about the role of emotion. Emotion makes us who we are. You can look at two people's assets, liabilities, knowledge, and skills and compare them. If they are evenly matched in knowledge and skills, the person who's mentally stronger will win most every time. That's why we put a lot of emphasis on looking at emotional strengths. Let's face it, emotions either become a supplement or a detriment to performance.

It's also important to look at balance. I get so concerned when I go to corporations where people work long hours. Research has indicated that if you're very good at what you do and you work 10 hours a

day, 7.5 to 8 of those hours will be productive. It also shows that if you're very good at what you do and you work 13 hours a day, you still get 7.5 to 8 hours of productivity. It's like stretching four years of college into six. Mom and Dad keep paying but you get the same education.

This is why we'll talk about time in terms of quality versus quantity, and that relates directly to balance. I've seen so many people who've worked so many hours that they've destroyed their families. They steal time away from their spouses, children, and friends, they sacrifice their leisure activities, and they begin to hate their jobs because their jobs have stolen everything important to them.

If you're a leader in a corporate environment, you need to help your colleagues understand that work is not who you are, it's what you do. The same goes for leadership. There are a lot of people in positions of power who bring a lot of baggage from the job into their personal lives, which makes them very unpleasant to be around because they get wrapped up in a strange power syndrome. True leaders need to understand that a job is what you do to enable the enjoyment of your personal life.

We'll also talk a lot about commitment in the coming chapters. There are a lot of little, intangible things that separate leaders from other people. We'll examine in detail how personality traits and personality test scores influence leadership. In addition to that, we'll discuss the basic commitment to doing what you do, which I hope will give you some important things to think about.

This book is not an effort to certify you in any way as a leader. It's not an attempt to sway your perception of what leadership is or to give you a rah-rah presentation about what leaders should do and what they are like. It's an attempt to present to you things that will lead you to think about and examine who you are, who you want to be, and where you want to go with your life.

And with that, we will begin to look at some very specific areas within leadership that you might want to think about.

### **Final Thought**

*Decide where you are and where you want to be.*

*Let common sense be your guide.*