



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# The Stepping Stone

April 2004 – Issue No. 14

# The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You

by Faisal Siddiqi

The following is a review of John C. Maxwell's book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. I was introduced to this book only in December 2003, though it has been available since 1998. Mr. Maxwell has written an excellent summary of the characteristics that are found in many leaders. He has also followed up this text with supplementary texts, such as "Developing The Leaders Around You," amongst many others that create a process for developing a set of leadership skills. This review provides a general outline of the approach used and illustrates some of the key laws.

## General Approach

His approach to the 21 Laws makes his book easy to read and easy to understand. He approaches each law through an explanation of the law. He then cites an example from his personal experiences and generally cites an example of famous or infamous individuals who have followed the law and succeeded, or not followed the particular law and found their achievement was less than expected or had terrible consequences. In some chapters, he elaborates on the law and again provides examples to illustrate his point. He ends each chapter summarizing the particular law and stating the law again.

## Illustrative Laws

The first law is the "Law of the Lid." I thought it was a strange law to begin with, but, after reading it, I realized the power and why Mr. Maxwell started off with this law. In essence, this law shows that many people are dedicated to being successful but they may not be developing their leadership ability. As a consequence, some people work very hard, yet are not thought of as being very effective. By developing leadership skills and characteristics, Maxwell graphically illustrates, on pages six and seven, that hard work combined with developing leadership skills will remove the lid

that is capping your effectiveness. An excellent example is provided with respect to McDonald's restaurants.

The second law is the "Law of Influence." The style in which this chapter is set up is very good and I will go into some detail here. Maxwell quickly sums up leadership as having the ability to influence people, and to influence people you have to earn their respect. In this chapter, he also reviews some common myths about leadership. The myths he discusses are as follows:

**The Management Myth:** This myth is the misunderstanding that managing and leading are one and the same. Leading people involves influencing them while managing people involves maintaining systems and processes. A test of this myth is to ask someone to affect change which can only be done through leadership.

**The Entrepreneur Myth:** This myth is the belief that all salespeople and entrepreneurs are leaders. An example is given about how a salesperson can convince you to purchase an item but that same person cannot really change you for the long term.

**The Knowledge Myth:** This myth is the belief that those who possess the most knowledge have the most power and are therefore leaders. This myth may be particularly true in actuarial circles, but the problem cited here is that knowing a lot does not necessarily equate into being a good leader who can convince people to follow. Other skills besides knowledge are required.

**The Pioneer Myth:** This myth is the observation that the person who does something first is a leader. Though this may be true in some



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service and administration), increase efficiency and reduce errors to minimum. There is a lot of room for improvement in the existing process. Besides having a product committee developing and managing those excellent new products and spending the money, how about adding a process improvement committee? For every dollar spent, make it well spent; for every customer, keep and make him/her a satisfied customer!

**Actuaries can be good Black Belts!**

I think actuaries are well suited for the roles of Black Belts. By default, we have excellent statistical/quantitative and problem-solving skills, which is an essential requirement of the Six Sigma process.

A Black Belt must be technically competent, bottom-line driven, customer-focused, a good project manager and be able to train and develop people. Above all, he/she must take ownership of the projects. Does it sound like a GOOD actuary at work? If your company has adopted Six Sigma, try to become a Black Belt. It will be an invaluable career booster. If your company has not implemented the Six Sigma, try to adopt the Six Sigma Black Belt work attitude and method for yourself; you will find you are investing for a bright future.

I am very interested in hearing from people involved in Six Sigma projects in the insurance industry, to see how Six Sigma works in the insurance companies and the roles of actuaries in the Six Sigma projects. □

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cases, it is not always so. An example is given that Sir Edmund Hillary was the first to climb Mt. Everest, yet the leader of that expedition was John Hunt.

**The Position Myth:** This myth is the belief that those in leadership positions are leaders. Many counter examples are given, along with the reasons why some people without leadership positions are actually leaders and those with leadership positions are not necessarily leaders.

In general, the second law gives a lot of food for thought and explains why certain people are perceived as leaders while others are not.

The last law I will discuss is the "Law of Navigation." This law expands on the management myth mentioned before. The important point discussed in this chapter is that anyone can steer a ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course. Maxwell brings the point home with a comparison of the two teams who were trying to be first to reach the South Pole. The leader of the first team carefully chartered his course, studied the ways of experienced travelers in these regions, recruited the best people and set up supply points to ensure a successful trip. The leader

of the second team did not plan anything and decided to use all the wrong resources for this trip. The result? The first team reached the South Pole and came back safely, while everyone on the second team endured a difficult trip and all died as a result of trying to return from the South Pole. I liked this chapter in that the examples given were good reading and the idea that planning pays off.

If you have any interest in becoming a leader, I recommend Maxwell's book. It provided important insight into the qualities of leaders. A lot of it came across as common sense, but it's only common sense that comes from experience. □

**Bibliography:**

John C. Maxwell. 1998. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

