

"Hans Finzel is an excellent communicator and has one of the broadest grasps of leadership of anyone I have encountered."

KATHRINE LEE, Pure Hope Foundation and The Ultimate Source

TOP TEN WAYS TO BE A GREAT LEADER

HANS FINZEL
PRESIDENT OF HDLEADERS

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HANS FINZEL

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transforming lives together

TOP TEN WAYS TO BE A GREAT LEADER

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FOREWORD

Hans Finzel has the broadest grasp of leadership of any person I have encountered. He relates leadership to the real world in such practical terms. I've had so much fun reading this, his newest book on leadership, because Hans is a truly brilliant communicator. If you enjoyed his *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, you must read this companion book. That book was what to avoid. This is about what to master in leadership.

As a life coach and business strategist, I am consistently asked who mentors me in leadership. Hands down, my answer is Hans Finzel. Over the years, Hans's influence has made me the leader that I am, and I continue to follow his advice and use his insights. He looks at all aspects of leadership and is always adding the best to his toolbox. He then passes those tools on in a fun-to-follow way.

In his latest work, *Top Ten Ways to Be a Great Leader*, Hans gives razor-sharp information in a way that is easily applied. The philosophies, mind-sets, and action steps that he lays out in this book will make you a better leader, even a *great* leader.

I love that he addresses an area of leadership that most forget about. Tackling the areas of emotional intelligence and pride, Hans unpacks key aspects of why we don't listen. Everyone teaches us to listen, but Hans addresses the reasons why we don't.

What Hans has written on emotional intelligence blew me away! I told Hans, "You are the most effective communicator I have heard on this critical subject. Your teaching on emotional intelligence is better than any of the many top resources I have used to teach on the subject." I've already used these excellent key concepts in my own teaching.

What you have in your hands is practical, workable, and highly useful information for our own leadership. Just when I think I have a good grasp on leadership, Hans comes up with a new concept that brings me one of those "aha" moments that sharpen my skills even more.

I have had the privilege of working up close and personal with Hans and Donna Finzel. I believe the tools in this book are perfect for those in executive leadership. This is also a perfect Leadership 101 for the new entrepreneur just starting out and learning to be a leader for the first time.

Kathrine Lee
Founder of Pure Hope Foundation, life
coach, business strategist, and creator
of The Ultimate Source

INTRODUCTION

Whenever I speak to audiences on leadership, I ask this question: “How many of you have ever worked for a terrible boss?” Not only do 90 percent of the hands go up, but I also get all kinds of rolling eyes and groans. It’s as if people are saying to me, “Oh wow, Hans, let me tell you about the jerk I had to work under.”

When it’s your turn to lead, what will others say about you? No leader is perfect, but I am assuming you picked up this book because your desire is to improve your leadership skills. Good for you. I think I can help. Here is my first piece of leadership advice: *don’t do what comes naturally*. Trust me on this. Who are we really in our own human natures? I think most of us are naturally self-centered, looking out for ourselves first. Think about this. Do we have to teach young children to fight over toys? No. Not at all. They love to scream, “Mine!” The kind of leadership I advocate is the opposite: focusing on others first. Great leadership is not about *me*. It is about *we*. It is what I call *servant leadership*—caring more about the good of my team than my own enrichment.

Sure, we have some good gut-level instincts that will serve us well in leadership. But I have observed that there are more bad leaders out there than good ones; more incompetent managers than healthy ones. This is because so many of them are out first and foremost for their own careers and their own benefits. This is true in business, ministry, church, education, military, sales, and government.

Did you hear about Robert Rizzo, the incompetent city manager of Bell, California? He became a symbol of municipal greed and “was sentenced ... to twelve years in prison—less than half the time it will take the nearly bankrupt Los Angeles suburb to dig itself out of the estimated \$150 million in debt he left behind.”¹ He and his cronies were living high on the hog with zero accountability, spending the city into ruin. Sometimes I look at someone in a position of leadership and just scratch my head and wonder, “How did he *ever* get appointed to that job?”

So why do I advise you not to start your leadership career by doing what comes naturally? Because of our natural tendency to look out for ourselves first. Serving others does not come naturally. We fall into mistakes and poor habits that perpetuate the terrible-boss epidemic. Face it: many of us have had a lot of poor role models in our working career. We repeat the poor mistakes we have seen in our awful bosses.

I have been leading and watching leaders for thirty years. Here are a few of my lifetime leadership axioms:

- If you do what comes naturally, you will be a poor leader.

- People are confused about how to be a great leader because of poor role models. In other words, we lead as we were led.
- There seem to be more bad leaders than good leaders.
- The world needs more great leaders.

My passion is to help produce more great leaders for all disciplines. I love mentoring leaders into a place of healthy influence where they empower those under them, not frustrate them. You don't want those you lead to be raising their hands in my audiences, do you?

Let me be clear about something from the get-go: I am not writing this book because I consider myself a great leader. No, it is born out of the many mistakes I have made and the wisdom I have learned over the years of practicing leadership. Although I have written a number of other books on leadership, I have never spelled out what I believe are the basic leadership “must-haves.” The book you now hold in your hands is a great primer for those of you just entering into leadership. But it is also great for those of you who have experience in leadership but hunger to improve your game. This book will examine the essential skills and characteristics you must have to be an effective leader.

How would you respond if I asked you these questions: What are the most important skills you want your leaders to practice? What matters most to you about the personal character of your leaders? As I was writing this book, I asked my

podcast listeners to answer this question: “What is one essential characteristic of a great leader whom you would respect and love to follow?” I also turned the question around and asked it this way: “What are the biggest blind spots you have seen in your leaders, which frustrate you big-time?” I wish I could hear your answers.

I combined the answers of my listeners with my own thirty years of leadership experience and pondered my own response. These ten chapters present the essential skills I believe every new leader must master. Using the letters in the word LEADERSHIP, I share my advice for both the hungry new leader and the seasoned leader looking for fresh help. At the end of each chapter, for those of you who want to dig deeper, I give you and your team some action points and discussion questions.

How would you define leadership? Is there one key to it? Are leaders born or are they made? Leadership is a complicated topic. It reminds me of trying to define *love*. So much has been written about both, and hundreds of definitions swirl around. After a lot of searching, I found the simple one-word definition for leadership I like best: *influence*. Every time you influence

I found the simple one-word definition for leadership I like best: *influence*. Every time you influence someone to take an action, positive or negative, you are leading that person.

someone to take an action, positive or negative, you are leading that person. That applies in your home, your church, your community, your job, and your life.

If you're in a position to influence others, keep working at your leadership skill set. If you have the gift of leadership, remember that Paul said in Romans we should work hard at sharpening it our whole lives: "If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously" (Rom. 12:8 NLT).

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“L” IS FOR LISTEN AND LEARN

My friend Chuck works for a global aerospace firm in Southern California. He told me a crazy story recently about when his “big boss” came to town to fix some problems and “listen to the troops.” Chuck is in his early thirties and has to deal with some of the generational tension between his youthful team and baby boomer bosses. Chuck shared with me, “Our boss flew in from Saint Louis to have a big meeting with all of us on the team. He wanted to hear our concerns and learn what was causing problems in our production output. We spent all morning in a conference room with this gentleman, and—would you believe it?—every single issue we brought up he shot down with excuses. He blamed us and refused to listen to our concerns at all. It was like talking to a brick wall. He spent all morning rationalizing, making excuses, and belittling any legitimate concerns we brought up.”

I asked Chuck, “So how did that make you feel?” He said he and his colleagues left that meeting extremely discouraged, with their tails between their legs. “We wondered why that big boss bothered to fly out to see us. He did not listen to one word we said. He made us feel terrible. It makes us all want to quit and find a better place to work.”

I am always amazed to hear stories like this. Isn't it crazy how many people get into top management positions who have no business being there? I am sure you have scratched your head a time or two, wondering how an incompetent person ever got promoted to that place of leadership.

I love the topic of leadership because leaders make things happen. Leaders affect all of us, whether we lead, follow, or try to stay out of the way. History is the story of leaders, good and bad, who have done amazing good and terrible evil. I have a passion to help people starting out in leadership get on the right track and avoid the awful mistakes that make life miserable for followers.

Think about the question I told you I ask audiences when I start my talks on leadership: “How many of you have ever worked for a terrible boss?” When I ask that “terrible boss” question, it is as if 90 percent of the audience raising their hands are saying, “If only you knew the half of it!” When I drill down into the stories of these folks and their experiences, I am amazed at how often the issue of listening comes up—or really, the lack of listening. “Our team leader is so arrogant—she just does not listen. She is the world's expert on everything. I think she loves to hear herself talk!” I hear story after story of frustrated followers who wish they could be heard.

The problem of poor listening has increased dramatically in the last decade, particularly due to smartphones and the ubiquitous presence of the Internet and advertising. Now I even get attacked when I am filling up my car at the pump, with a little screen screaming advertisements at me. And social media addiction has taken distraction to a whole new level. Have you noticed that fewer people than ever really listen to you in the midst of all the disruption of technology? How do you feel when someone really does listen deeply to you? When we are really heard, we feel *valued*. I feel, in those rare moments, that my leader really does care about me.

If you are just starting out as a leader, this lesson is one of the most important you will hear from me. Hardly any behavior hurts followers more than a leader who does not know how to listen.

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TWO IDEAS JOINED AT THE HIP

The “L” in LEADERSHIP stands for two very important words: *listen* and *learn*. It has been my observation that one greatly affects the other. People who don’t do well with one generally don’t practice the other. If you are not willing to be a lifelong learner, why should you listen to great ideas from other people? Conversely, can you learn and grow without listening?

Great leaders know how to listen to their teams, and they are lifelong learners. People like to work with that kind of leader.

Listening and learning are vital, and I want to unpack each skill separately. If you just work on these two skills, you are going to set a great foundation for your future leadership.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

How good a listener would people around you say you are? I want you to think about your own listening skills. At the end of this chapter, I have an exercise for you that will help you find out how great or poor you are as a listener. For some people, listening comes naturally. But for many of us, it is a struggle. And even though we might be the leader, we're not the only ones with a voice; we have to learn to listen to our team.

I want you to feel what followers like Chuck feel when they have to suffer under leaders who don't listen. Here is my short list of the painful eight:

How do you feel if you are not listened to? I feel ...

1. Unimportant.
2. Marginalized.
3. It's a waste of time trying.
4. I am invisible.
5. My opinions are not respected.
6. I am not respected.
7. I have nothing to contribute.
8. Nothing is going to change.

I’m sure you can add to this list, but those points cover the most common reactions to leaders who don’t listen. Many of these relate to the idea of respect. Lack of respect is a huge issue in the workplace. Followers can tell whether the leader respects them by how well she listens. Kohei Goshi, former chairman of the Japan Productivity Center, once said, “It may be difficult to teach a person to respect another unless we can help people to see things from the other’s point of view.”¹

Here’s what I’ve observed: *most leaders love to talk*. They enjoy listening to their own pearls of wisdom and great insights. “People should listen to me because I am the boss!” Sometimes they even begin to believe their own press. They only listen to positive feedback and things outsiders say about them. Outsiders who don’t work with them might think they are awesome, but those on the inside know better! If your leaders have this unrealistic view of themselves, they claim more and more authority as they believe they have less and less reason to listen to subordinates. One of the curses of leadership is being isolated at the top of the pile, the king of the mountain.

Have you ever noticed that there’s much more horizontal communication in an organization than vertical? Coworkers talk often with one another about all sorts of things, but the communication between those coworkers and their superiors is much less frequent and tends to be a lot more formal.

The book of James has great advice for all of us: “You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry”

(James 1:19 NLT). It's interesting—as I talk to so many followers and employees who feel stuck in miserable jobs, I often dig down into what it is about their boss that really frustrates them. It's amazing how often I hear the words, “Our boss just doesn't listen to us. It is always one-way communication.” We should really all listen to the book of James.

I have been flying Southwest Airlines a lot lately. Southwest has a refreshing culture that is different from most airlines, some of which don't seem to care about their customers. The culture at Southwest was set by the founder, Herb Kelleher. He listened to his troops, and he was passionate about empowering people at the “bottom” of the company: flight attendants and gate agents. When you talk to a gate agent at Southwest, he actually listens to you. When you call Southwest's customer service, they really seem to care. They solve your problems without having to go up the chain of command for permission. Responding to the needs of the people you work with communicates that you really care about them.

The more people you lead, the more you have to listen, but the harder it becomes. Effective leadership has more to do with listening than with talking, because through listening—and we'll see this as you read on—you gain more wisdom and insight. If you listen to the people in the trenches and rely on their information, you will make better decisions. Chuck's boss lost a great opportunity to improve their company because he refused to accept constructive input. Sadly, he learned nothing new on that trip—he missed out on information that could have greatly helped their company.

A lot of leaders get stuck in isolation because they are at the top of a large organization and lose touch with the front lines. Whether it's people to whom you're ministering, people to whom you're providing a service, or people to whom you're selling things, you have to learn that the end user is king. It is for that person's sake that you do what you do. The higher you go in leadership, the more you're isolated and insulated from those people on the front lines. That's one of the biggest reasons you have to learn to listen to your people. Herb Kelleher never forgot this powerful principle, even when Southwest Airlines grew to be the largest domestic carrier of people in North America.

For twenty years, I served as CEO of a global nonprofit. I know what it is like to have too many demands from too many people. When we start out

The higher you go in leadership, the more you're isolated and insulated from those people on the front lines.

in leadership, we might just have one or two people looking to us to lead them. But what if we are wildly successful? What if we get promoted? Or what if our team grows, and before we know it, we have dozens of people expecting us to be an example of a caring leader? What will happen if our team grows to an organization of hundreds? This is a great problem to have, but it brings its own problems with it!

Say you are successful and you have more and more people reporting to you. You get a big promotion. Your team is growing. Or say you just got a new job with direct reports for the first time.

Maybe your church or ministry is growing and you are hiring staff for the first time. As you embark on this journey of leading more and more people, you will face huge new challenges. The list that follows unpacks some leadership growing pains that make it hard to listen to everyone as your span of control grows.

WHY IT'S TOUGH FOR BUSY LEADERS TO LISTEN

Too little time. The more people you lead, the less time you have for each person. And, of course, the more demands each of them has of you. “Wow,” you might think to yourself, “I used to have a lot more time for me before I got this team!” The telecommunications revolution is tightening the information noose around the neck of the average leader. Leaders can become so saturated with communication that they find their systems shutting down from a time-crunch overload.

Too many people. As I led our ministry, I needed to have a strong relationship with dozens of leaders in our organization, including the top leaders in the home office, the leaders of our field offices in North America, our international directors, and the sixty-plus leaders of our projects around the world. There were just too many of them to keep up with. But they could each get frustrated with me if I didn't take the time or build the systems whereby they could communicate with me. Most people in your organization want a piece of the leader at one time or another. And they want you to take the time to listen to them. And thus the *crisis*

of expectations: the more people there are, the harder it is to link up with them and listen.

Too much pressure. Leaders find themselves under constant pressure from deadlines and responsibilities they can barely handle alone. You have the onslaught of email, texts, and social media. There are so many ways people can bombard us. The image of a soldier in battle comes to mind. Here I sit in the trenches. Bullets are flying everywhere, planes are buzzing overhead, tanks are rolling in my direction, and the radio is crackling with news from many fronts. In the midst of this, along comes one of my people who wants a long, quiet conversation about his concerns. The extreme pressure of leadership sometimes makes it very difficult to listen attentively. It seems like it's harder than ever to just stop and listen. Even as you're reading this book, I'll bet you're distracted. You're likely multitasking, not simply concentrating on my words. How many times have you stopped in this chapter to coddle your phone? If you managed to stay focused, congratulations. I know that's an accomplishment!

Too big a distance. In some cases, the problem of physical distance between the leader and her followers makes it tough to stay in close contact. My wife, Donna, leads a team of direct sales specialists who are physically located all over North America. She spends a *lot* of time connecting with her team via phone, Skype, Zoom, Voxer, and other applications. At times she gets frustrated because she cannot simply sit down with them and have a face-to-face conversation. In my leadership ministry, I had the added challenge of many of our top leaders living thousands of miles away from me, some of them on other continents.

Too much knowledge. Leaders sometimes know so much that they find it hard to listen to people rehearsing stories, facts, or anecdotes they have already heard a thousand times. As your team member is droning on, you are thinking, “Okay, I have already heard that story,” or, “Tell me something I don’t know!” The more knowledge we have and the more we’ve experienced, the harder it is to listen to others patiently. I am often tempted to say, “Give me the *Reader’s Digest* version!” Pride may also be involved, coming on the heels of the knowledge problem. Sometimes we think we know too much; we get to the place where we don’t think we can learn from others. That’s why I’ll devote the final chapter of this book to the problem of pride and the power of humility in leadership.

Nothing stops the progress of an organization more quickly than leaders failing to listen. Followers want to communicate with their leaders. If you fail to listen to them, their very effectiveness and job satisfaction will be in jeopardy. You don’t have to agree with them, but they need to know they were heard.

A good leader will let people sense they have been heard, even if their advice is not followed.

I’ve had people say to me, “Hans, I just don’t feel you’re a good listener.” I hate it when somebody says that to me. I take it

personally because I try to be a good listener. If I dig into what’s really behind that statement, it is often the fact that I didn’t do what they wanted me to do. That’s the price of leadership. We have to make hard decisions, and leadership is not a popularity

contest. So sometimes people say “You don’t listen” just because you ignore their advice. That’s different from not being a good listener. A good leader will let people sense they have been heard, even if their advice is not followed. At the end of this chapter I share some action points about how to practice the feedback loop.

FOUR FACTORS OF DOUBT

One reason people might say you don’t listen well is that you shut down doubt. Do you get defensive when people disagree with you? I learned this lesson when we were moving our offices from Chicago to Denver. We left a terribly broken building in Wheaton, Illinois, and built a brand-new, fifty-thousand-square-foot international headquarters in Littleton, Colorado. The decision affected a lot of our employees and their families. Even though we as leaders (the senior staff and board of directors) thought it was a great idea, we had many detractors who were skeptical when we announced the decision. Some thought it was a stupid idea, and others thought we were going to destroy our organization.

I eventually realized through that journey that shutting down the doubters was counterproductive. I learned that what Spencer Johnson said in *Who Moved My Cheese?* is very true: “A change imposed is a change opposed.”²² We as leaders need to *embrace doubt*—not shut it down. That’s when I came up with this list of the four factors of doubt. When changes are imposed on people, it is human nature for them to push back. As the leader, my job is to address the doubt every step of the way down this spiral.

1. It ain't broke. “We did not know there was a problem!” That's the first reaction when changes are announced. This is when people first begin doubting. All of a sudden, they are being asked to move from A to B, and they love A. Our first job as leaders of change is to show them why A is broken and why we need to move to B. For my team, many members loved living in Chicago and did not realize our building was so very broken.

2. Don't fix it. “We're in shock about your solution to a non-problem.” That's the “don't fix it” issue; don't fix what's not broken. You as the leader might be totally convinced that a change is necessary, but that does not mean your team sees what you see. In our situation, we had to build a case for change and show our team why we had to get a new facility and why moving to Colorado made economic and strategic sense.

3. We are being ambushed. “We had no idea change was coming. We felt ambushed.” This is when the leader just steps up and says to the team, “It has been decided.” Their first question is, of course, “Who decided?” And the second question follows naturally upon the first: “Why were we not involved?” Sometimes decisions have to be made behind closed doors, like our relocation. In those cases, it is much harder to get buy-in from followers. I have a friend who likes to say, “If they are not up on it, they are down on it.”

4. We gave no input. This is when the followers say, “We offered no input for the solutions imposed on us. We might have actually had a better solution.” And guess what? They usually do have good input that you can use. Wherever possible, be very open

about change ideas. Run them past your team *before* you implement new things.

After the move to Colorado, it took me a few years to recover from some of the misunderstandings that had occurred because I was a young, green leader. I learned to embrace doubt, not shut it down. Being a good listener takes a lot more time than being a dictator. But you get much better results.

So what happens if you are a good listener? Well, I'll turn the list I gave you earlier in the chapter around.

Being a good listener takes a lot more time than being a dictator. But you get much better results.

How would Chuck and his team have felt if the big shot from Saint Louis had taken the time to hear them without being defensive? How will your followers feel if you're a good listener and you take the time to listen to their concerns?

How do you feel if you are listened to? I feel ...

1. I am important—instead of unimportant.
2. I am an essential part of the team—instead of marginalized.
3. I matter to my boss—instead of a waste of time trying.
4. I am visible!—instead of invisible.
5. My voice is respected—instead of my opinions are not respected.

6. I am respected—instead of I am not respected.
7. I matter—instead of I have nothing to contribute.
8. Real change is coming—instead of nothing is going to change.

LIFELONG LEARNING

“The most notable trait of great leaders, certainly of great change leaders, however, is their quest for learning. They show an exceptional willingness to push themselves out of their own comfort zones, even after they have achieved a great deal.”

—Frances Hesselbein and Paul Cohen, *Leader to Leader*³

The second key word that comes to mind for the “L” in LEADERSHIP is *learn*. It is the flip side of the “L” coin. And while I am adding words that start with the letter “L,” you’ll see I also slipped in *lifelong*. If we stop learning today, we will stop leading tomorrow. This never changes. We never arrive at a place of

full knowledge about our work. And we certainly never arrive at a place of maturity. One of the most mature leaders in the New Testament was the apostle Paul. After decades of leadership experience, he said,

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take

hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it [*arrived, mature*]. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12–14)

Paul was saying that he had not yet matured and become perfect. He was on a lifelong journey of becoming all that God wanted him to be. We all have to be lifelong learners. We are living in a day of such rapid change that our college degree is obsolete soon after commencement. Whatever training you might have, formal or informal, it is a great foundation for what you are doing now—but it’s not enough.

How can you learn new things and become even more hungry to grow as a person? Step one is to be an open vessel. French scientist Claude Bernard said it so well: “It is what we think we know already that often prevents us from learning.” The hunger to grow and learn is the opposite of pride.

I was talking to Donna about this chapter, and she said, “Be sure to mention how important it is to invest in your own development.” Self-improvement is critical to growing in your leadership. Thank you, Donna, for that great advice, because it’s so true. She’s been in her business for fifteen years, and I watch her improve and the people she’s working with improve as they grow. Everyone who succeeds in her line of work becomes a

leader. They all build teams that create a huge need for personal growth, and often they are stepping into a role of leading others for the first time. If they want to become more successful, they have to pay attention to their own personal development. My good friend David Beavers, who works in the same company Donna is in, says that “our business is a personal development program cleverly disguised as a business.”

I have a sign on my desk that reads, “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.” It reminds me to grow every day and keep learning new things that sometimes scare me. Reading this book is a great example of striving to improve your leadership. Going to seminars, reading great books, listening to podcasts, and getting feedback are all constructive.

HOW A GREAT LEADER LEARNED TO GROW

I enjoy studying great leaders in the Bible. One of my favorites is Moses. I wrote a book about his leadership, *The Top Ten Leadership Commandments*. I love Moses because he was a reluctant leader who succeeded at leading a tough group of people across a desert for forty years without giving up. Talk about a tough leadership calling! But Moses was a lifelong learner. As important as he was, as powerful as he was, as much responsibility as he had, he still listened and learned.

In Genesis, there’s a classic story about Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. I call Jethro the first management consultant in

the Bible. Right after a huge leadership success, Moses had to learn an important lesson. The message came through his father-in-law. Who might be trying to give you messages that you need to hear about improving your leadership? Are you willing to listen to their voices?

Moses bragged to Jethro about all the amazing things that had happened through his leadership—taking the children of Israel through the Dead Sea and then watching their enemies drown before their eyes. The Bible doesn't say whether Moses took the time to play with his children or spend time with his wife or work on his marriage and his family; there's nothing in there about that. We are left to our own imaginations. We do know that Moses sent his wife and his kids away to live with the in-laws because he was so busy doing the work of God. His father-in-law sent him a message: “Moses, I'm coming back to see you and, by the way, I'm bringing your family with me” (see Exodus 18:6).

When Jethro arrived on the scene, he was delighted to hear about all the good things Moses had done for Israel and how he and God as a team rescued God's people from the hands of the Egyptians. That night, Jethro went to bed and pondered Moses's situation. He loved and respected his son-in-law and wanted to give him some important advice.

The next day, Jethro truly got the picture of why Moses was so busy—too busy for his family. All day long, people lined up to get advice from him. The line was out the doorway of the tent and around the block. When his father-in-law saw all that

Moses was doing, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?” (v. 14). Can you imagine? People stood around all day waiting for Moses to solve their problems. That’s a leader with a problem. Jethro looked at Moses and said, “What you are doing is *not good*” (v. 17).

The advice from Jethro to Moses was clear. It is great advice for all of us. He told Moses to build a team and learn to delegate (see vv. 21–23). He would lighten his load by sharing it with others. Jethro basically said, “You need to appoint other people to help you. You don’t have to be a control freak; you alone don’t have to do everything. You have to spread the load, you have to build a team, you have to be able to spend time with your family. You have to have time off. You’re going to burn yourself out.”

Can you imagine how stressed-out Moses was and how frustrated all these people were as they waited in line to see him? They would be happy to talk to somebody else to get their conflicts resolved or their problems answered. Jethro helped Moses learn to be team-centered in his leadership. The coolest thing is “Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said” (v. 24). Unlike many leaders, Moses actually learned and changed his leadership habits.

I’ve seen too many leaders fail in their professional lives for personal reasons. It often had to do with this kind of workaholic lack of balance. But not only did Moses back off from his work and appoint other leaders to help him, he reengaged with his wife and kids. Jethro gave Moses’s wife and kids back to him:

“Here you go. These are your responsibilities. I’m out of here. I love my grandkids, but you need to raise them.”

There’s not a single one of us who doesn’t have areas in which we need to grow. Remember the “L” in LEADERSHIP, the first of the ten critical characteristics every new leader must master: be a good *listener* and a *lifelong learner*.

ACTION POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Here are some action points that will help you grow in your ability to listen and learn as a new leader. And you can turn each of these into discussion questions for a group study with your team.

1. Sharpen your listening skills with feedback. If you really want to sharpen your listening skills, ask the people you work with, “Hey, how would you rate me as a listener on a scale of one to ten?” And once they give you the number, ask: “Please tell me why you gave me that score. And tell me how I can do a better job of listening.” When they tell you, please don’t be defensive. You might need to ask the question behind the question, but they will tell you how you come across.

2. Try feeding back to people what they said to you. This is a great listening skill because, remember, communication is not a one-way street. It is not just giving out information—it is getting through. Test to see if what you are hearing is really what they are

saying. The best way to be sure is to say, “Okay, let me tell you what I just heard you say,” and then simply say it back to them. They can either agree or correct your understanding. And if you go out and do something different, at least they know they were heard. Try some role-play with this as a team.

3. There is no substitute for face time with your team. I was using that term long before Apple installed FaceTime on their devices. Sometimes you really have to have personal, one-on-one face time with your people. As much as I love technology, there are times when we really need to sit down with people. A friend of mine who is a consultant was just fired by a client this morning. He asked me what I think happened—I was the one who got him the gig. I said, “I really think the client did not know you as a person. You spent no time alone building the relationship. It was all business, and the only time you saw the client was in meetings.” My friend’s client misunderstood and lacked trust in him because their relationship was never solidified over some good old-fashioned face time. Be sensitive to times when you need to have a direct face-to-face conversation with a member of your team.

4. Consume a regular diet of resources that help you grow. Read great books and articles, and listen to CDs and podcasts. Constantly sharpen your leadership game. I was telling somebody today that doctors, nurses, and all sorts of medical practitioners have to go to continuing medical education throughout their

careers. They can't just graduate and say they're done—they have to keep their skills sharp for the rest of their lives. The same thing applies to leadership. A great way to get the most out of this book is to read it as a team. Meet for breakfast or lunch and discuss the action points at the end of each chapter.

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