

SECTION VI

THE VALUE OF 360-DEGREE LEADERS

Becoming a 360-Degree Leader isn't easy. It takes a lot of work, and it doesn't happen overnight. But it is worth every bit of the effort. In all my years of leadership teaching and consulting, I've never had a leader come to me and say, "We have too many leaders in our organization." So no matter how many good leaders your organization has, it needs more 360-Degree Leaders—and it needs you!

As you seek to grow as a leader, you will not always succeed. You will not always be rewarded the way you should be. Your leaders may not listen to you at times. Your peers may ignore you. Your followers won't follow. And the battle may feel like it's uphill all the way.

Please don't let that discourage you—not for long, anyway. By becoming a better leader, you add tremendous value to your organization. Everything rises and falls on leadership. The better 360-Degree Leader you become, the greater impact you will be able to make.

As you near the conclusion of this book, I want to give you some encouragement to keep on growing and learning. And I want to do it by letting you know why you should keep working to become a 360-Degree Leader. Keep reading. And on the days when the climb seems too steep, reflect on these observations to help you remember why you should keep climbing and keep leading from the middle!

Value #1

A LEADERSHIP TEAM IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN JUST ONE LEADER

Leadership is a complicated and difficult skill, one that no single person ever masters. There are some things I do well as a leader and some I do poorly. I'm sure it is the same for you. Even the greatest leaders from history had blind spots and weak areas.

For teams to develop at every level, they need leaders at every level.

So what's the solution? Organizations need to develop leadership teams at every level! A group of leaders working together is always more effective than one leader working alone. And for teams to develop at every level, they need leaders at every level.

LEADERS WHO BUILD TEAMS

As a leader in the middle, if you develop a team, you will be making your organization better and helping it to fulfill its vision. You will be adding value no matter where you serve in the organization. As you do that, keep the following ideas in mind:

1. VISIONARY LEADERS ARE WILLING TO HIRE PEOPLE BETTER THAN THEMSELVES

One leader I interviewed for this book said that a pivotal moment in his leadership journey occurred when someone asked him, "If you could hire someone who you knew would move the organization forward, but you would

have to pay them more than your salary, would you hire them?" He said that question really arrested him. He thought about it long and hard, and when he finally concluded that he would, it changed the way he viewed his team and himself.

360-Degree Leaders are willing to hire people better than themselves. Why? Because their desire is to fulfill the vision. That is paramount. Anytime leaders find themselves being selfish or petty, they can be sure that they have wandered far from the vision. The way to get back on track is to put the vision first, and let everything else settle back to its rightful place.

2. WISE LEADERS SHAPE THEIR PEOPLE INTO A TEAM

Leaders begin to develop wisdom when they realize they can't do anything significant on their own. Once they realize that, leaders can also develop more humility and begin working to build a team.

Each of us needs others on the team to complete us. 360-Degree Leaders don't build teams so that others can take a menial role and serve them. They don't hire others to do the dirty work or to become errand runners. They look for the best people they can find so that the team is the best it can be.

Chris Hodges said that one of the ways he learned the value of teamwork was by observing congressmen doing their work in Washington, D.C. When representatives want to propose a bill, the first thing they do is find a cosponsor. If they can find someone across the aisle, all the better. Chris takes that practice to heart. He said that before he tries to accomplish anything, the first thing he does is build a team of people who believe in what they are doing. A team of people will always be more powerful than an individual working alone.

3. SECURE LEADERS EMPOWER THEIR TEAMS

Wayne Schmidt says, "No amount of personal competency compensates for personal insecurity." That is so true. Insecure leaders always have to go first. They are consumed with themselves. And that self-focus often drives them to bring second-best people around them.

On the other hand, secure leaders focus on others, and they want others to do well. They are happy to let their teams get all the credit. Their desire to see others succeed drives them to equip, train, and empower their people well. Anytime you focus on others, empowerment naturally becomes the by-product.

"No amount of personal competency compensates for personal insecurity."

—WAYNE SCHMIDT

4. EXPERIENCED LEADERS LISTEN TO THEIR TEAMS

Experienced leaders listen before they lead. General Tommy Franks said:

Generals are not infallible. The army doesn't issue wisdom when it pins on the stars. Leading soldiers as a general means more than creating tactics and giving orders. Officers commanding brigades and battalions, the company commanders and the platoon leaders—all of them know more about their unit strengths and weaknesses than the general who leads them. So a successful general must listen more than he talks.¹

Immature leaders lead first, then listen afterward—if they listen at all. Anytime leaders don't listen, they don't know the heartbeat of their people. They don't know what their followers need or want. They don't know what's going on. Good leaders understand that the people closest to the work are the ones who are really in the know.

Immature leaders lead first, then listen afterward.

If your people aren't following, you need to listen more. You don't need to be more forceful. You don't need to find more leverage. You don't need to come down on them. If you listen, they will be much more inclined to follow.

5. PRODUCTIVE LEADERS UNDERSTAND THAT ONE IS TOO SMALL A NUMBER TO ACHIEVE GREATNESS

Over the past twenty-five years, I've watched the trends in business and nonprofits, and the solutions that organizations use to improve and to solve problems. I've seen a definite pattern. Perhaps you've seen it too.

- In the 1980s, the word was *management*. The idea was that a manager was needed to create consistency. (The goal was to keep standards from slipping.)

- In the 1990s, the key concept was *leadership by an individual*. Organizations saw that leaders were needed because everything was changing so quickly.
- In the 2000s, the idea is *team leadership*. Because leading an organization has become so complex and multifaceted, the only way to make progress is to develop a team of leaders.

I think organizations are going to improve greatly as they develop teams, because leadership is so complex. You can't do just one thing well and be a good leader. You can't even lead in just one direction—you need the skills to lead up, across, and down! A leadership team will always be more effective than just one leader. And a team of 360-Degree Leaders will be more effective than other kinds of leadership teams.

Value #2

LEADERS ARE NEEDED AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE ORGANIZATION

In 2004 I was invited to teach a session on leadership to NFL coaches and scouts at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama. It was quite an experience. One of the things I taught that day was the Law of the Edge: “The difference between two equally talented teams is leadership.”

After my session, I talked to a general manager of one of the teams, and he confirmed my observation. He said that because of the parity of talent in the NFL, the edge comes from leadership—from the owner, the head coach, the assistants, and right on down to the players. Leadership is what makes the difference at every level of the organization.

WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT A LEADER

I know I say this so often that some people are tired of hearing it, but I believe it down to the core of my being. *Everything rises and falls on leadership.* It really does. If you don’t believe it, just put together a group of people without a leader, and watch them. They will drift. When there is no good leader on a team, in a department, at the top of an organization, or heading a family, then the following results are inevitable.

WITHOUT A LEADER, VISION IS LOST

If a team starts out with a vision but without a leader, it is in trouble. Why? Because vision leaks. And without a leader, the vision will dissipate and the team will drift until it has no sense of direction.

On the other hand, if a team starts with a leader but without a vision, it will do fine because it will eventually have a vision. I say that because if you had to

define leaders with a single word, perhaps the best one would be *visionary*. Leaders are always headed somewhere. They have vision, and that vision gives not only *them* direction, but it gives their people direction.

WITHOUT A LEADER, DECISIONS ARE DELAYED

I love a story that President Reagan told showing how he learned the need for decision making early in his life. When he was young, a kind aunt took him to have a pair of shoes custom made. The shoemaker asked him if he wanted his shoes to have square toes or round toes, but Reagan couldn’t seem to make up his mind.

“Come back in a day or two and let me know what you decide,” the shoemaker told him. But Reagan didn’t go back. When the man saw him on the street and again asked him what kind of shoes he wanted, Reagan said, “I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

Not all good decision makers are leaders, but all good leaders are decision makers.

“Very well,” the man responded. “Your shoes will be ready tomorrow.”

When Reagan went to pick them up, he discovered that the toe of one shoe was round and the other was square. Reagan later said, “Looking at those shoes taught me a lesson. If you don’t make your own decisions, somebody else makes them for you.”

Not all good decision makers are leaders, but all good leaders are decision makers. Often it takes a leader to make decisions—and if not to make them, then to help others make them more quickly.

WITHOUT A LEADER, AGENDAS ARE MULTIPLIED

When a team of people come together and no one is clearly the leader, then individuals begin to follow their own agendas. And before long, all the people are doing their own thing. Teams need leadership to provide a unifying voice.

WITHOUT A LEADER, CONFLICTS ARE EXTENDED

One of the most important roles of a leader is conflict resolution. In the absence of clear leadership, conflicts always last longer and inflict more damage. Often it takes a leader to step up, step in, and bring everyone to the table to

work things out. When you lead others, you should always be ready to do what it takes to help your people resolve their conflicts.

WITHOUT A LEADER, MORALE IS LOW

Napoleon said, “Leaders are dealers in hope.” When leaders are not present, people often lose hope and morale plummets. Why is that? Because *morale* can be defined as “faith in the leader at top.”

WITHOUT A LEADER, PRODUCTION IS REDUCED

The first quality of leaders is the ability to make things happen. One of my favorite stories that illustrates this truth comes from the life of Charles Schwab, who once ran U.S. Steel. Schwab said:

I had a mill manager who was finely educated, thoroughly capable and master of every detail of the business. But he seemed unable to inspire his men to do their best.

“How is it that a man as able as you,” I asked him one day, “cannot make this mill turn out what it should?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I have coaxed the men; I have pushed them; I have sworn at them. I have done everything in my power. Yet they will not produce.”

It was near the end of the day; in a few minutes the night force would come on duty. I turned to a workman who was standing beside one of the red-mouthed furnaces and asked him for a piece of chalk.

“How many heats has your shift made today?” I queried.

“Six,” he replied.

I chalked a big “6” on the floor, and then passed along without another word. When the night shift came in they saw the “6” and asked about it.

“The big boss was in here today,” said the day men. “He asked us how many heats we had made, and we told him six. He chalked it down.”

The next morning I passed through the same mill. I saw that the “6” had been rubbed out and a big “7” written instead. The night shift had announced itself. That night I went back. The “7” had been erased, and a “10” swaggered in its place. The day force recognized no superiors. Thus a fine competition was started, and it went on until this mill, formerly the poorest producer, was turning out more than any other mill in the plant.¹

Leaders are creative in finding ways to help others become productive. Sometimes it means laying out a challenge. Sometimes it means giving people training. Sometimes it means encouraging or putting up incentives. If the same thing worked for every person in every situation, then there would be no need

for leaders. Because every person is different and circumstances are constantly changing, it takes a leader to figure out what's needed and to put that solution into action.

WITHOUT A LEADER, SUCCESS IS DIFFICULT

I believe many people want to dismiss the importance of leadership when it comes to organizational success. They don't see it—and in some cases they don't want to see it. That was the case for Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*. I've met Collins, and I can tell you that he is an intelligent and perceptive guy. But he did not want to include leadership in the study that formed the foundation of the book. He wrote:

I gave the research team explicit instructions to downplay the role of top executives so that we could avoid the simplistic "credit the leader" or "blame the leader" thinking common today . . . Every time we attribute everything to "Leadership," we're . . . simply admitting our ignorance . . . So, early in the project, I kept insisting, "Ignore the executives," but the research team kept pushing back . . . Finally—as should always be the case—the data won.²

Collins goes on to describe level five leaders—leaders who exhibit both a strong will and great humility—and how every great company they studied was led by one such leader.

Leadership comes into play, even when you don't want it to. Your organization will not function the same without strong leaders in every department or division. It needs 360-Degree Leaders at every level in order to be well led.

Value #3

LEADING SUCCESSFULLY AT ONE LEVEL IS A QUALIFIER FOR LEADING AT THE NEXT LEVEL

Growing organizations are always looking for good people to step up to the next level and lead. How do they find out if a person is qualified to make that jump? By looking at that person's track record in his or her current position. The key to moving up as an emerging leader is to focus on leading well where you are, not on moving up the ladder. If you are a good 360-Degree Leader where you are, I believe you will be given an opportunity to lead at a higher level.

As you strive to become the best 360-Degree Leader you can be, keep the following things in mind:

1. LEADERSHIP IS A JOURNEY THAT STARTS WHERE YOU ARE, NOT WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

Recently while I was driving in my car, a vehicle to the left of me attempted to turn right from the middle lane and caused an accident. Fortunately, I was able to slow down quickly and lessen the impact; but still, my air bags deployed, and both cars were greatly damaged.

The first thing I noticed after I stopped and took stock of the situation was that the little computer screen in my car was showing my exact location according to the GPS system. I stared at it a moment, wondering why the car was telling me my exact latitude and longitude. And then I thought, *Of course!* If you're in real trouble and you call for help, the first thing emergency workers will want to know is your location. You can't get anywhere until you first know where you are.

Leadership is similar. To know how to get where you want to go, you need to know where you are. To get where you want to go, you need to focus on what

you're doing now. Award-winning sportswriter Ken Rosenthal said, "Each time you decide to grow again, you realize you are starting at the bottom of another ladder." You need to have your eyes fixed on your current responsibilities, not the ones you wish to have someday. I've never known a person focused on yesterday to have a better tomorrow.

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2. LEADERSHIP SKILLS ARE THE SAME, BUT THE "LEAGUE OF PLAY" CHANGES

If you get promoted, don't think that because your new office is just a few feet down the hall from your old place that the difference is just a few steps. When you get "called up" to another level of leadership, the quality of your game must rise quickly.

No matter what level you're working on, leadership skills are needed at that level. Each new level requires a higher degree of skill. The easiest place to see this is in sports. Some players can make the jump from recreational league to high school. Fewer can make it from high school to college. And only a handful can make it to the professional level.

Your best chance of making it into the next "league of play" is to grow on the current level so that you will be able to go to the next level.

3. GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES COME ONLY AFTER HANDLING SMALL ONES WELL

When I teach at a conference or go to a book signing, people sometimes confide in me that they desire to write books too. "How do I get started?" they ask.

"The only conquests which are permanent and leave no regrets are our conquests over ourselves."
—NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

"How much writing do you do now?" I ask in return.

Some tell me about articles and other pieces they are writing, and I simply encourage them; but most of the time they sheepishly respond, "Well, I haven't really written anything yet."

"Then you need to start writing," I explain. "You've got to start small and work up to it."

Leadership is the same. You've got to start small and work up to it. A person who has never led before needs to try to influence one other person. Someone who has some influence should try to build a team. Just start with what's necessary.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "Start doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." All good leadership begins where you are. It was Napoleon who said, "The only conquests which are permanent and leave no regrets are our conquests over ourselves." The small responsibilities you have before you now comprise the first great leadership conquest you must make. Don't try to conquer the world until you've taken care of things in your own backyard.

4. LEADING AT YOUR CURRENT LEVEL CREATES YOUR RESUMÉ FOR GOING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

When you go to see a doctor for the first time, you are usually asked a lot of questions about your family history. In fact, there are usually more questions about that than there are about your lifestyle. Why? Because family history, more than anything else, seems to be what determines your health.

When it comes to leadership success, history is also similarly disproportionate. Your track record where you work now is what leaders will look at when trying to decide if you can do a job. I know that when I interview someone for a job, I put 90 percent of the emphasis on the track record.

If you want to get the chance to lead on another level, then your best chance for success is to lead well where you are now. Every day that you lead and succeed, you are building a resumé for your next job.

5. WHEN YOU CAN LEAD VOLUNTEERS WELL, YOU CAN LEAD ALMOST ANYONE

At a recent President's Day conference where we were discussing leadership development, a CEO asked me, "How can I pick the best leader out of a small group of leaders? What do I look for?"

There are many things that indicate someone has leadership potential—the ability to make things happen, strong people skills, vision, desire, problem-

solving skills, self-discipline, a strong work ethic. But there is one really great test of leadership that is almost foolproof, and that is what I suggested: “Ask them to lead a volunteer group.”

If you want to test your own leadership, then try leading volunteers. Why is that so difficult? Because with volunteers, you have no leverage. It takes every bit of leadership skill you have to get people who don't have to do anything to do what you ask. If you're not challenging enough, they lose interest. If you push too hard, they drop out. If your people skills are weak, they won't spend any time with you. If you cannot communicate the vision, they won't know where to go or why.

If you lead others and your organization has any kind of community service focus, encourage the people on your team to volunteer. Then watch to see how they do. If they thrive in that environment, then you know that they possess many of the qualifications to go to another level in your organization.

Donald McCannon, former CEO of Westinghouse Broadcasting Corporation, stated, “Leadership is action, not position.” Taking action—and helping others to do the same in a coordinated effort—is the essence of leadership. Do those things where you are, and you won't remain long there.

Value #4

GOOD LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE MAKE BETTER LEADERS AT THE TOP

In industrialized and free-market nations, we often take leadership for granted. A leadership culture has evolved to run the many organizations in such countries because commerce and industry are so strong. And because markets are so competitive, many of the leaders who emerge work hard to keep improving their leadership.

In developing countries, things are different. In the last five or six years, I've spent a lot of time teaching leadership around the world, and what I've found is that great leaders are few and far between in many of those countries—and 360-Degree Leaders are almost nonexistent. Most leaders in undeveloped countries are highly positional, and they try to keep as much distance as possible between their followers and themselves. It's one of the reasons there is such a difference between the haves and the have-nots. There are, of course, many exceptions to the broad generalization I'm making, but if you've traveled overseas a great deal, you have probably noticed it too.

In places where the top leaders try to keep everyone else down, the overall leadership is usually pretty poor. Why? Because when all the power is at the top and there are no leaders in the middle to help them, the top leaders cannot lead very effectively.

Just in case you think I'm being too critical of leaders in emerging nations, I can tell you that this is a problem any place where there is one leader at the top and no 360-Degree Leaders to help lead. I personally experienced it in my own life in my first leadership position because I didn't try to identify, develop, or empower anyone else to lead. As a result, my leadership was weak, the overall

effectiveness of the organization was far below its potential, and within two years after I left the organization, it shrank to half its former size.

Good leaders anywhere in an organization make better leaders at the top.

It's hard to overestimate the value of 360-Degree Leaders in the middle of an organization. In fact, good leaders anywhere in an organization make better leaders at the top—and make for a much better organization overall.

EVERY TIME YOU ADD A GOOD LEADER, YOU GET A BETTER TEAM

Good leaders maximize the performance of those on their team. They set direction. They inspire their people and help them work together. They get results. This is easy to see in sports where the only thing that changes on a team is the coach. When a better leader comes in, the same players often perform at a much higher level than they did before.

The same thing happens in any kind of organization. When a strong leader takes over a sales team, their performance goes up. When a good manager takes over at a restaurant, the operation runs more smoothly. When a better foreman runs the crew, the people get more done.

If you were to look at your entire organization (assuming it's not a mom-and-pop-sized operation), you would be able to locate the quality leaders even before you met them. All you would have to do is look for the teams with consistently high results. That is where the good leaders are.

EVERY TIME YOU ADD A GOOD LEADER, ALL THE LEADERS IN THE ORGANIZATION GET BETTER

I thought it was very interesting when Tiger Woods moved up from the amateur ranks to become a professional golfer. He was so good that the rest of the field looked weak. He won his first Master's Tournament at Augusta by a huge margin, and afterward he said he didn't even have his "A" game all the days he played. Many people feared that Woods would so dominate the game that nobody would ever be able to beat him.

But a funny thing happened after Woods had played for a few years. Everyone else's game went to another level. Why? Because strength brings out strength. The book of Proverbs says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."¹

When a good leader joins the team, it makes the other leaders take notice. Good leaders bring out the best, not only in their followers but also in other leaders. Good leaders raise the bar when it comes to performance and teamwork, and this often challenges other leaders in the organization to improve.

GOOD LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE ADD VALUE TO THE LEADERS ABOVE THEM

Leaders in the middle of an organization are closer to the people in the trenches than are the leaders on top. As a result, they know more about what's going on. They understand the people who are doing the work and the issues they face. They also have greater influence at those lower levels than the top leaders.

When there are no good leaders in the middle of an organization, then everyone and everything in the organization waits on the top leaders. On the other hand, when good leaders in the middle use their influence and commitment to assist the top leaders, they "stretch" the top leaders' influence beyond their reach. As a result, the top leaders are able to do more than they would ever be able to do on their own.

GOOD LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE RELEASE TOP LEADERS TO FOCUS ON THEIR PRIORITIES

The higher you climb in an organization as a leader, the more you will see but the less you will actually do. You can't move up and keep doing all the tasks that you do now. As you move up, you will have to hand off many of your old responsibilities to others. If the people who are supposed to do those tasks don't perform them well, then you will have to keep taking those things back. You probably will not be able to do your new responsibilities effectively if that happens.

Let's face it. There is no greater frustration for senior leaders than operating at a level below their own, because leaders in the middle need continual hand holding. If a leader has to do that, the organization ends up paying high-level dollars to solve low-end problems.

For this reason, the leaders at the top can only be as good as the middle leaders working for them. When you perform with excellence in the middle, you free up your leaders to perform with excellence above you.

GOOD LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE MOTIVATE LEADERS ABOVE THEM TO CONTINUE GROWING

When a leader grows, it shows. Growing leaders continually improve in their personal effectiveness and their leadership. Most of the time that makes their leaders want to keep growing. Part of that comes from healthy competition. If you're in a race and someone is getting ready to pass you, it makes you want to pick up your pace and move faster.

There is also the contribution factor. When team members see others on the team making a significant contribution, it inspires them to step up. There is a natural joy that comes from being on a team that is functioning on an extremely high level.

GOOD LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE GIVE THE ORGANIZATION A FUTURE

No organization keeps moving forward and growing using yesterday's ideas and ways of doing things. Future success requires innovation and growth. And it requires the continual emergence of new leaders. In *The Bible on Leadership* (Amacon, 2002), Lorin Woolfe writes, "The ultimate test for a leader is not whether he or she makes smart decisions and takes decisive action, but whether he or she teaches others to be leaders and builds an organization that can sustain its success even when he or she is not around."

Today's workers are tomorrow's leaders in the middle of the organization. And today's leaders in the middle will be tomorrow's leaders at the top. While you function as a 360-Degree Leader in the middle of the organization, if you keep growing you will probably get your opportunity to become a top leader. But at the same time, you need to be looking at the people working for you and thinking about how you can prepare them to join you and eventually take your place in the middle. You will be able to spot potential leadership candidates because they will be more than just good workers.

TODAY'S WORKERS

- Implement current ideas
- Identify and define problems
- Get along with the people they have
- Work within the current framework
- Value consistency

TOMORROW'S LEADERS

- Generate new ideas
- Solve problems
- Attract sharp people
- Take risks
- Value and spot opportunities

Leadership expert Max DePree said, "Succession is one of the key responsibilities of leadership." That is true. There is no success without a successor. Being a 360-Degree Leader is about more than just doing a good job now and making things easier today for the people working above and below you. It is about making sure the organization has a chance to be good tomorrow too. As you teach others to perform 360-Degree Leadership, you will be giving the organization greater depth as well as strength. You will be helping to raise the bar in such a way that everybody wins.

Value #5

360-DEGREE LEADERS POSSESS QUALITIES EVERY ORGANIZATION NEEDS

When I was outlining this book, I talked to a friend about the whole concept of 360-Degree Leadership, and he asked, “What makes a 360-Degree Leader different from any other kind of a leader?” When I started to explain the concept of leading up, across, and down, he said, “Okay, but why are they able to lead in every direction? What makes them tick?”

I chewed on his question for a while as we talked about it, and I finally landed this answer: “360-Degree Leaders have certain qualities that enable them to lead in every direction, and that is what makes them valuable to an organization.”

“You need to put that in the book,” he advised, “because people can try to do all the right actions, but if they don’t embrace those qualities internally, they may never get it.”

I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about it before, but what adds greater value to the people around you: what you *say* or what you *are*? You may not be aware of it, but you can actually add value to others simply by possessing the right qualities. The higher you go in an organization, the more that applies.

360-Degree Leaders, as I envision them, possess qualities that every organization wants to see in all of its employees, but especially in its leaders. Those qualities are adaptability, discernment, perspective, communication, security, servanthood, resourcefulness, maturity, endurance, and countability.

ADAPTABILITY—QUICKLY ADJUSTS TO CHANGE

People from the middle down are never the first to know anything in an organization. They are usually not the decision makers or policy writers. As a result, they must learn to adapt quickly.

When it comes to leading in the middle, the more quickly you can adapt to change, the better it will be for the organization. Here’s why. All organizations contain early, middle, and late adapters. The early adapters are won over by new ideas quickly, and they are ready to run with them. Middle adapters take more time. And then the late adapters slowly (and sometimes reluctantly) accept the change.

Since you, as a leader in the middle, are going to be asked to help the people who follow you to accept the change, you need to process change quickly—the quicker the better. That may mean there will be times when you must embrace a change before you are even ready to do so emotionally. In such cases, the key is your ability to trust your leaders. If you can trust them, you will be able to do it. Just keep reminding yourself, *Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be bent out of shape.*

Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be bent out of shape.

DISCERNMENT—UNDERSTANDS THE REAL ISSUES

The president of the United States, an old priest, a young mountain climber, and the world’s smartest man were riding together on a private plane when it suddenly suffered engine trouble. The pilot scrambled from the cockpit saying, “We’re going down; save yourselves!” He then jumped out of the plane and activated his parachute.

The four passengers looked around but found only three parachutes.

The president took one and—as he jumped—said, “I must save myself for the sake of national security.”

The world’s smartest man grabbed one and jumped, saying, “I am an invaluable resource to the world and must save my intellect!”

The old priest looked at the mountain climber and said, “Save yourself, my son. I’ve been in the Lord’s service for forty years, and I’m not afraid to meet my Maker.”

“No sweat, Padre,” answered the young man. “The world’s smartest man just jumped with my backpack!”

Good leaders cut through the clutter to see the real issues. They know what really matters. There’s an old saying that a smart person believes only half of what he hears, but a really smart person knows which half to believe. 360-Degree Leaders cultivate that ability.

PERSPECTIVE—SEES BEYOND THEIR OWN VANTAGE POINT

Jack Welch said, “Leadership is seeing opportunity in tough times.” That ability is a function of perspective. One of the advantages of being a leader in the middle of the organization is that you can see more than others do. Most people have the ability to see things on their own level and one level removed from their own.

“Leadership is seeing opportunity in tough times.”
—JACK WELCH

The people at the bottom can see and understand things on their own level and, if they’re perceptive, also on yours. The people at the top can see and understand things on their own level and on one below theirs, which would be yours. But as a leader in the middle, you should be able to see and understand not only things on your own level but also one level up and one level down. That gives you a really unique advantage—and opportunity.

COMMUNICATION—LINKS TO ALL LEVELS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Because you have a unique perspective and understanding of the organization that others above and below you may not have, you should strive to use your knowledge not only for your own advantage but also to communicate both up and down the chain of command. We often think of communication in organizations as being primarily top-down. Leaders at the top cast vision, set direction, reward progress, and so forth. Good communication, however, is a 360-Degree proposition. In fact, sometimes the most critical communication is from the bottom up.

In *Leading Up* (Crown, 2001), Michael Useem gives examples of important messages that were sent “up the chain of command.” Some messages were heeded and acted upon with positive effect. For example, when trade deputy Charlene Barshefsky came to the table to negotiate a trade deal between the U.S. and China, allowing China to enter the World Trade Organization, Barshefsky had previously listened to concerns of business and labor leaders, and she represented those interests at the table. The result was a successful negotiation.

Other messages that were sent “up” were ignored. Useem says that when General Roméo Dallaire, commander of the United Nations’ troops in Rwanda, tried to persuade his superiors to let him take aggressive action to head off what

he saw as the impending threat of genocide, his request was denied. The result was disastrous—the death of more than 800,000 people as the Hutus slaughtered the Tutsis.

“The biggest job in getting any movement off the ground is to keep together the people who form it.”
—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The biggest job in getting any movement off the ground is to keep together the people who form it. This task requires more than a common aim; it demands a philosophy that wins and holds the people’s allegiance; and it depends upon open channels of communication between the people and their leaders.”

SECURITY—FINDS IDENTITY IN SELF, NOT POSITION

I love the story of Karl, who enjoyed a good laugh at his office after he attached a small sign to his door—“I’m the Boss!” The laughter was even louder when he returned from lunch and saw that someone had made an addition to his sign. Next to it was a yellow Post-it note on which someone had scribbled, “Your wife called and said she wants her sign back.”¹

It takes a secure person to be a good leader in the middle of an organization. In our culture, people ask, “What do you do?” not, “Who are you?” or, “How are you making a difference?” Most people place too much emphasis on titles and position instead of on impact.

But if you have been effective as a leader in the middle for any length of time, you understand that your role is important. Organizations don’t succeed without leaders who do their job well in the middle. 360-Degree Leaders must try to be secure enough in who they are *not* to worry about where they *are*.

The true measure of leaders is not the number of people who serve them but the number of people they serve.

If you are ever tempted to spend too much time and energy on getting out of the middle, then change your focus. Instead, put your effort toward reaching your potential and doing the most good you can where you are. Anytime you focus on developing your position instead of yourself, you are in effect asking,

Am I becoming the person others want me to be? But if you focus on developing yourself instead of your title or position, then the question you will repeatedly ask is, Am I becoming all I can be?

SERVANTHOOD—DOES WHATEVER IT TAKES

I believe the true measure of leaders is not the number of people who serve them but the number of people they serve. 360-Degree Leaders adopt an attitude of servant first, leader second. Everything they do is measured in light of the value it can add. They serve the mission of the organization and lead by serving those on the mission with them.

Robert Greenleaf, founder of Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, gave an excellent perspective on this: “The servant-leader is a servant first. It all begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that the other people’s highest priority needs are served.”

How do you know whether you are motivated by the desire to serve as a leader? It’s actually very simple. You have the heart of a servant if it doesn’t bother you to serve others. If you lack a servant’s attitude, then it grates on you when you do have to serve.

RESOURCEFULNESS—FINDS CREATIVE WAYS TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

With presses set to run three million copies of Theodore Roosevelt’s 1912 convention speech, the speech’s publisher discovered that permission had not been obtained to use photos of Roosevelt and his running mate, Governor Hiram Johnson of California. And that was a problem because copyright law put the penalty for such an oversight at one dollar per copy.

The quick-thinking chairman of the campaign committee was a resourceful leader. He dictated a telegram to the Chicago studio that had taken the pictures: “Planning to issue three million copies of Roosevelt speech with pictures of Roosevelt and Johnson on cover. Great publicity opportunity for photographers. What will you pay us to use your photographs?”

The reply: “Appreciate opportunity, but can pay only \$250.” The deal was done, the presses ran, and a potential disaster was averted.

Leaders in the middle of an organization need to be especially resourceful, because they have less authority and fewer resources. If you desire to be an effective 360-Degree Leader, then get used to doing more with less.

MATURITY—PUTS THE TEAM BEFORE SELF

How do you define *maturity*? In the context of leadership, I define it as “putting the team before oneself.” Nobody who possesses an unrelenting me-first attitude is able to develop much influence with others. To lead others, you need to put the team first.

I recently read a story about a group of principals in the Nashville school system who realized that for their students to succeed, they needed to employ a bilingual specialist. The only problem was that there was no money in their budgets to do it. What was their solution? They set aside the money that would have been used for their own raises to hire the person they needed. The team and the children they support were more important to them than personal gain. That’s mature leadership!

In leadership, maturity is putting the team before oneself.

ENDURANCE—REMAINS CONSISTENT IN CHARACTER AND COMPETENCE OVER THE LONG HAUL

A couple of years ago when I was in Africa teaching on leadership, I had the opportunity to go on a photo safari. It was an incredible experience. One of the things we did while out in the bush was follow, for about an hour, a pair of cheetahs that were hunting. Cheetahs are amazing animals. They are the fastest land animals on the planet, with the ability to run at an amazing seventy miles per hour. But cheetahs are pure sprinters. If they don’t run down their prey with their first burst, then they go hungry. The reason they can’t run long is that they have small hearts.

360-Degree Leaders can’t afford to have small hearts. With all the challenges that come to leaders—especially leaders in the middle—leadership is an endurance race. To succeed, 360-Degree Leaders need to respond well to challenges and keep responding well.

COUNTABILITY—CAN BE COUNTED ON WHEN IT COUNTS

In *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, one of my favorite laws is the Law of Countability: “Teammates must be able to count on each other when it counts.” I love that law not only because it is true and very important for team building, but also because it gave me the opportunity to make up a word. I think *countability* really captures the idea of people being able to depend on one another no matter what.

When you trust a leader, when he or she possesses countability, it has greater value than just knowing you can count on that leader. It means you really do count on them. You depend on them for your success. You’re in it together, and you will fail or succeed as a team. That kind of character really makes a difference in a culture where most people have an every-man-for-himself attitude.

I believe most leaders in the middle of organizations don’t get enough credit, because the middle is where most organizations succeed or fail. The leaders at the top can make only so big an impact on any organization, and the workers in the trenches can do only so much. They are often more limited by the leaders above them than they are by resources or their own talent. Everything truly does rise and fall on leadership. If you want your organization to succeed, then you need to succeed as a 360-Degree Leader.

One of the finest examples I’ve ever encountered that shows the value and impact of a leader in the middle can be found in the life of General George C. Marshall. When most people think of the leadership that won World War II for the Allies, they think of leaders like Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. And while I acknowledge that the war would not have been won without those two great leaders, I also believe it would not have been won without the effective 360-Degree Leadership of Marshall.

Marshall was always a good soldier, and everywhere he served, he led well—up, across, and down. He attended the Virginia Military Institute, where he graduated as first captain. He went on to serve in the infantry in the U.S. Army. Marshall was such a good student and influenced his superiors so much that after finishing first in his class at the School of the Line at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and then taking a more advanced course, he was kept as an instructor.

Marshall never failed to add value wherever he served—in the Philippines (two tours); in France during World War I; as a senior aide to General Pershing during a tour in China; as the chief of instruction at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia; as well as at other posts. It’s been said that Marshall “rose through the ranks of the military with a record of achievement rarely equaled by any other.”²

Marshall’s career was stellar, but you can really see him making a significant impact as the appointed U.S. Army chief of staff. From that position, he led up to the president, he led across to the other Allied commanders, and he led down with his own senior officers.

When he entered that office, the United States’ military forces were anemic and ill equipped. All the branches of service combined comprised fewer than 200,000 people. With war breaking out in Europe, Marshall knew what he needed to do—build a large, well-prepared, and powerfully equipped army. And he set about the task immediately. In four years’ time, Marshall expanded the military to a well-trained and well-equipped force of 8,300,000.³ Winston Churchill called Marshall “the organizer of victory.”

That alone would make Marshall a hero of World War II, but that wasn’t his only contribution. He worked tirelessly throughout the war and continually showed an ability to lead up, across, and down. President Roosevelt found his advice invaluable and said that he could not sleep unless he knew Marshall was in the country. And Roosevelt requested Marshall’s presence at every major war conference, from Argentina, Newfoundland, in 1941, to Potsdam in 1945.⁴

Marshall continually had to lead across in the area of military strategy. He is credited by some for ensuring cooperation between the Allied forces during the war. He went head-to-head against other generals when it came to strategy too. MacArthur wanted the United States to shift its primary focus to the Pacific theater of operations before defeating Germany. The British wanted to employ what was called the Mediterranean strategy against Hitler’s forces. But Marshall was convinced that to win the war, the Allies had to cross the English Channel and engage the Germans in France.⁵

Marshall won everyone over, and for a year he and his general planned the invasion of Normandy. After the war, Churchill said of Marshall: “Hitherto I had thought of Marshall as a rugged soldier and a magnificent organizer and builder of armies—the American Carnot [a man known as the “organizer of victory” for the French Revolution]. But now I saw that he was a statesman with a penetrating and commanding view of the whole scene.”⁶

Marshall was also as effective leading down as he was leading up and across. The people who served under him held a deep respect for him. After the war, General Dwight D. Eisenhower said to Marshall, “In every problem and in every test I have faced during the war years, your example has been an inspiration and your support has been my greatest strength. My sense of obligation to you is equaled only by the depth of pride and satisfaction as I salute you as the greatest soldier of your time and a true leader of democracy.”⁷

Even after the war, Marshall continued his influence as a 360-Degree Leader. He was asked to serve as secretary of state by President Truman. And when a plan was needed to rebuild the countries of Europe in the wake of such a devastating war, Marshall gave his support in a speech at Harvard University to what he called the European Recovery Plan. I’ve read that when President Truman’s aides wanted to call it the Truman Plan, the president wouldn’t hear of it. He valued and respected his secretary of state’s leadership so much that he called it the Marshall Plan.

There are not a lot of people about whom you can say that if he or she had not lived, the face of the world would look very different. Yet that is true for George Marshall. Europe, Asia, and the United States are different from what they would have been without his influence. There are few better examples of 360-Degree Leadership. In the end, Marshall’s influence was so great and his service so selfless that he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He is the only professional soldier in history to whom it has been given.

We can’t all hope to make a global impact as Marshall did. But that isn’t important. What matters is that we are willing to do what it takes to make a positive impact wherever we find ourselves in life—to add value in any way we can to others. I believe there is no better way to increase your influence and improve your chances of doing something significant than to become a 360-Degree Leader. As a 360-Degree Leader you can influence others no matter where you are in the organization, no matter what title or position you have, no matter what kind of people you work with. I hope you will keep working at it, and keep making a positive impact.

Section VI Review

The Value of 360-Degree Leaders

On those days when you wonder whether it's worth it to develop as a 360-Degree Leader and try to lead from the middle of the organization, remind yourself of the great value 360-Degree Leaders add:

1. A leadership team is more effective than just one leader.
2. Leaders are needed at every level of the organization.
3. Leading successfully at one level is a qualifier for leading at the next level.
4. Good leaders in the middle make better leaders at the top.
5. 360-Degree leaders possess qualities every organization needs.

If you still haven't taken the 360-Degree Leadership assessment, don't forget that it is offered free of charge to people who have purchased this book. Visit 360DegreeLeader.com for more information.