Introduction

The frustrating tensions battled every day in leadership are universal, and leaders today face the challenge of influencing people from all sides of an organization. Ninety-nine percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization. John C. Maxwell, author of The 360-Degree Leader, explains the principles leaders can use to bring value and influence to and from anywhere in the organization, enabling them to lead up, lead across, and lead down.

Many managers with leadership responsibilities feel that because they are not the main leader, that they cannot influence their bosses, peers, and subordinates. Even if managers report to someone else, they can use the three different skills of leading up, leading across, and leading down the enterprise. Once leaders can incorporate these principles into their own style of management, they will be able to influence others in every direction and become a 360-Degree Leader.
PART I. THE MYTHS OF LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE OF AN ORGANIZATION

Only 360-Degree Leaders can influence people at every level of the organization. Before outlining the three leadership skills, it is important to understand the 7 myths of leading from the middle of the organization.

Myth #1 can be referred to as the position myth, where people believe they must have a certain title to lead. In reality, there is no need to possess a specific title to exert influence and become a successful leader. These people might wait for a more senior leader to empower them with authority, instead of building relationships with others to influence naturally. These people will only follow within the boundaries of a leader’s job description. However, people can move beyond the boundaries of their position by building respectful relationships and valuing each person as a unique individual who gives something positive to the organization.

A manager’s achievements will encourage people to follow because of the leader’s contribution to the team. Part of contributing to the team is to develop others’ skills that sharpen their ability to lead. This can be referred to as leadership reproduction. In these situations, leaders value their people enough to mentor them and make them more valuable to the company.

Potential leaders do not need to be at the top of their organization in order to develop relationships with others and motivate people to work with them. Leaders should be able to exert their influence from anywhere in the organization.

Myth #2 involves the belief that people cannot lead until they get to the top, referred to as the destination myth. The thinking goes something like this: “When I’m a leader, then I’ll figure out how to influence others in a positive way,” rather than learning these principles in order to be a leader. Becoming a leader is a journey of learning. The beginning of the journey may require people to adopt new ways of thinking, new skills, and new habits. According to John Wooden, Hall of Fame basketball coach, “when opportunity comes, it’s too late to prepare”.

Myth #3 is based on the belief that nobody will follow unless the manager is “on top”. People believe that just because they’re in a leadership position, that they automatically have the ability to be influential. This is not the case. Those who lack leadership experience often put the leadership title on a pedestal, overestimating its importance. No matter what position people hold, they must earn their level of influence over time.

Myth #4 is the mistaken belief that when people get to the top, they’ll automatically be in control. An example of this belief is the thinking that things would be different “if I were the boss”. When people believe they can improve the organization, they do what it takes to accomplish their...
goals. On the other hand, it’s easy to overestimate how much control a manager can have at the top of an organization. Many factors control an organization, and a person’s high-level position is no guarantee of the ability to exert influence. Basically, life at the top is not easier.

Myth #5 states that once leaders make it to the top, their role is a ticket to freedom. Leaders at the top do not necessarily have it made. They cannot always do what they want. There will always be boundaries. As leaders rise to higher positions, they have increased responsibilities, more pressure, and higher expectations. These leaders make a great impact, but at the same time, many leaders have less freedom instead of more.

Myth #6 is based on the thinking that people cannot reach their potential unless they’re top leaders. The reality is that most people never get to the top of an organization as a leader. While people need to strive to do their best, they don’t necessarily need to aspire to be at the top of their organization. Often the greatest impact is made from the middle.

For example, Vice President Dick Cheney exerts a huge amount of influence while knowing that the top position is not his best role. He believes he has reached his potential anyway. His is also a good example of a 360-Degree Leader, with the ability to influence others from whatever position he holds.

Myth #7 is the all-or-nothing belief that people won’t try to lead unless they can get to the top. Most people will never become CEO but they can still be effective leaders. CEOs aren’t the only ones who make a difference.

“You can lead others from anywhere in an organization. And when you do, you make the organization better.”

While being a leader in the middle of an organization has its challenges, an effective 360-Degree Leader can learn to lead from the side, from above, and from below and influence people at every level.

PART II: THE CHALLENGES 360-DEGREE LEADERS FACE

Leaders in the middle of an organization often experience frustration and struggle to succeed. There are seven common challenges that leaders in the middle of an organization face. Recognizing and identifying these challenges enables leaders to devise solutions and resolve issues.

Challenge #1 is referred to as the tension challenge, where leaders may not be sure of where they stand. While they may have some power, authority, and access to resources, they also experience restrictions in other areas and can get in trouble by overstepping their authority. Good managers think in terms of opportunities and learn to take initiative without overstepping their boundaries. Tension impacts leaders by empowerment, initiative, environment, job parameters, and appreciation. Leaders must empower others to make their own judgments and take appropriate action. These leaders make things happen. The more leaders initiate, however, the more they can conflict with others and experience tension.

Moreover, they need to realize that each organization has a unique environment that often takes on the personality and character of its leader. Good leaders assess their environment and determine how much tension there may be in order to decide whether positive aspects of the organizational environment outweigh the negative.

There are several ways to relieve tension which include becoming comfortable in the middle, knowing what to own and what to let go, finding quick access to answers, never
violating trust, and finding ways to relieve stress. One of the best ways leaders in the middle can be effective is to have quick access to answers, which may require the help of others, extra time, and a good relationship with the team. Moreover, it’s critical to avoid violating people’s trust. Violation of trust can easily happen when leaders abuse their authority and position. Once trust is violated, it’s extremely difficult to manage tension and sustain authority.

Tension can also be relieved by eliminating stress. Some techniques include venting frustrations to others or taking part in physical activities.

**Challenge #2** is one of frustration, where the issue becomes how to follow an ineffective leader. Being in this position naturally causes frustration.

Insecure leaders can cause this frustration because they can be self-absorbed, controlling, and fearful of being outshone. These leaders tend to react to situations with anger when something makes them look bad, maintain the status quo to avoid change, and keep the team constantly off balance.

Frustration is also caused by the leader without vision who fails to provide the passion, direction, or motivation to progress forward in an often unsupportive environment. This negative environment will be teeming with conflict. Some leaders can also be selfish, advancing at the expense of the team. They may hoard all the perks, and as a result, create not only frustration, but resentment.

There are ways to tackle the frustration and lead effectively. Building relationships with leaders, appreciating their strengths, adding value to those strengths, and complementing the leader’s weaknesses, help to keep frustration at bay. In addition, it’s important to expose leaders to good leadership resources such as helpful books or DVDs, and publicly affirm the leader’s accomplishments.

**Challenge #3** is the pressure of wearing many hats in the leadership role. People working at the bottom of an organization usually have one focused responsibility. These people are either talented at just one skill, or do not want to move up in an organization to become leaders.

Leaders at the top of an organization may be able to choose what they do, but they also feel the weight of success or failure of the whole organization. While leaders need to be able to do many things well, top leaders need to do fewer things with outstanding skill. People in the middle of an organization experience demands from leaders at the top, customers, expectations from followers, and vendors, all on a daily basis. These leaders have to get along with everyone and survive the dynamics of leadership. Leaders who are able to handle multiple tasks and responsibilities must also be experts at knowing which hat to wear in any given situation, requiring consistent behavior, commitment to the responsibility, and flexibility.

**Challenge #4** is the ego challenge. Leaders in the middle don’t always get the credit they deserve, which can damage the ego. Because effective leaders pay more attention to what gets done than to promotion, it’s important for people to focus on their duties, deliver the goods, and let being noticed come naturally. Since not everyone notices or appreciates the work people do, they must know that what they do is important. They must value their position and find contentment in knowing they are getting the work done. When jobs are done well, they make an impact which motivates people to do even more. People will notice when the work gets done, and can go a long way in motivating individuals by giving praise appropriately. “One compliment can keep me going for a whole month,” said novelist Mark Twain.

It is also essential to know the difference between self-promotion and self-less promotion. The former has a me-first mentality, whereas the latter puts others first.

**Challenge #5** appears when leaders tend to like the front more than the middle. It’s natural for leaders to want to move up, make a greater impact, and be at the top of the organization. There are advantages to being at the top, which include recognition and praise. However, recognition can be negative when things go wrong. Leaders at the top don’t have the freedom to neglect what they see from above. Leaders also must be careful to avoid moving forward too fast, risking the loss of their followers, and...
realize that despite their love of being in on the action, often the action comes from the middle. The right attitude, strong relationships, and a desire to win with the team lead to fulfillment anywhere in the organization.

Challenge #6 is the vision challenge. The more leaders invest in the vision, the more fulfillment they’ll have in bringing the vision to fruition. Leaders who continually communicate the company’s vision in every direction will more effectively fulfill their role in the middle. Leaders from the middle, however, are often asked to achieve a vision other than their own, and one they did not actually generate.

Often leaders don’t buy into a vision because they didn’t create it. Other times, they don’t understand it, don’t agree with it, or feel it’s impossible to achieve. The 360-Degree Leader connects the understanding of the vision from the top to the bottom of the organization. By aligning themselves with the vision, leaders anywhere in the organization can add value, improve the bottom line, and feel more fulfilled. And when satisfaction is high, so is success. The best way for leaders to make a vision a reality is by putting the needs of the organization first, keeping the vision in front of people, and understanding their roles in the process.

Challenge #7, the influence challenge, does not escape anyone. The challenge is to lead others beyond their positions. Leadership is influence, and without both position and the ability to persuade others, people will not follow. A leader must become a person people want to follow. These kinds of leaders care about their people, establish their character as trustworthy, exhibit competence, and remain consistent and committed to the cause. When leaders work hard to achieve these qualities, they will be able to exert influence, one of the requirements of being a good 360-Degree Leader.

PART III: THE PRINCIPLES 360-DEGREE LEADERS PRACTICE TO LEAD UP

In order to develop the ability to be a 360-Degree Leader, people must learn to lead up with their leader, lead across with colleagues, and lead down with followers. Each of these skills draws on different principles.

Leading up is the process of influencing a leader. The principles of leading up greatly increase the chance for success. Success in this case would mean leaders above will learn to trust and rely on subordinates in addition to seeking advice from them.

Lead-Up Principle #1: “Lead yourself. That’s where it all starts. Besides, if you wouldn’t follow yourself, why should anyone else?”

People who begin by leading themselves are practicing self-management. This practice emphasizes focus, discipline, and purpose. Leaders are impressed by people who manage themselves, maximize opportunities, and leverage personal strengths. Self-management requires managing emotions by controlling them and knowing when to display certain ones.

Leaders must also be able to manage their time. Time is valuable but until managers believe their own time is of value, they will not do anything constructive with it. Along with proper time management is priority management. Beyond that, good leaders in the middle manage their energy levels, their ways of thinking, their work, and their personal lives. In the process of leading up, leaders must understand that if they cannot lead themselves, others will not follow, respect, or partner with them.

Lead-Up Principle #2: “If you help lift the load, then you help your leader succeed.”

In other words, if the boss succeeds, so does the organization. Those who can successfully lift the load from their leaders demonstrate their commitment to the team. Leaders who lift others up are noticed; the result is that others will want to help in return. This reciprocity increases leaders’ value and influence, improving overall productivity.

There are several ways leaders can help to lift the load of their bosses. They can start by doing their own job well. When they find a problem or challenge, they provide a solution. Then it’s essential that leaders hear the truth and be open to bad news. People should stand up for their leaders and stand in for their leaders when appropriate. Finally, by simply asking leaders how they can lift the load, people will develop an open, positive, and connected dialogue.
Lead-Up Principle #3

Successful 360-Degree Leaders can do what others don’t want to do by stepping out of their comfort zones. These leaders work in obscurity and keep their egos at bay. Leaders can also help others by finding ways to succeed with difficult people, who are present in every organization. While being the first to take on the tough jobs, 360-Degree Leaders sometimes must put themselves, but not the organization on the line, admit faults, do more than is expected, and perform tasks that may not be part of their job description.

Lead-Up Principle #4

There is a distinct difference between managers and leaders. Managers work with processes while leaders work with people. Both are essential for running a successful operation. Leaders lead the people who manage the process. Unlike many managers, leaders think in the long term. By necessity, managers often must operate in the moment. Thinking long term requires leaders to see how events will impact those above, below, and around them. Taking organizations into the future requires leaders to push boundaries, find better ways of doing things, and encouraging progress and innovation. Leaders also must learn to use their intuition when working with such intangibles as morale, motivation, emotions, and attitudes.

Lead-Up Principle #5

Part of working successfully with these inevitable intangibles is the establishment of good relationships no matter whether people are leading up, across, or down the organization. Leaders must be able to connect with everyone around them. One way to encourage strong connections is to listen to people to find out what is important to them. Armed with this information, people and leaders can identify priorities, vision, interests, and personality. Once these aspects are understood, leaders can better support their vision, share their enthusiasm, earn their trust, and lead up.

Lead-Up Principle #6

All leaders value time. This principle suggests that people must be prepared when taking any of a leader’s time. Maxwell asserts that the best way to do this is to spend ten minutes preparing for every minute meeting with a leader. Respecting leaders’ time will encourage a relational connection that can open doors to new opportunities. Good thinking will also enable people to “bring something to the table”. These people may bring resources, ideas, or opportunities, and contribute to the conversation in a positive manner. There are other ways to be prepared when taking time from a leader: be prepared when asked to speak; learn to speak the boss’s language; get to the bottom line, and provide return on the leader’s investment. Where people add value to each other, they are practicing 360-Degree Leadership.

Lead-Up Principle #7

Timing is essential to good leadership. A good idea presented at the wrong time can be perceived as a bad idea. Therefore, it’s essential that leaders understand when time is running out, when to hold back, and when to push ahead. Assessing whether their responsibilities are at risk and figuring out how to help the boss win can bring clarity to an often ambiguous predicament. Learning to back off is appropriate in many situations, perhaps after a point has been made, or when the timing is off.

Lead-Up Principle #8

Becoming a team member who gets things done and demonstrates competency, responsibility, and reliability becomes the one people will turn to when things need to happen. Leaders are continually looking for people who will step up and take on the next challenge when it matters. These players produce under pressure when the momentum is low, when the load is heavy, and when the leader is absent. And, they deliver results under limited time frames when resources are few. Basically, no matter how tough a situation is, these team players excel.

“It doesn’t matter whom you’re helping, whether it’s your boss, a peer, or someone working for you. When you help someone on the team, you help the whole team. And when you help the team, you’re helping your leaders.”
Lead-Up Principle #9

Many people do not realize that they’re on an ongoing journey requiring growth and improvement each day. Leaders need to keep learning to better themselves at all times.

When people cease to learn and grow, they are damaging their leadership ability. When they recognize that learning and growth is a constant, they will enhance their potential to move forward.

“No matter how much it costs you to keep growing and learning, the cost of doing nothing is greater,” says Maxwell.

PART IV: THE PRINCIPLES 360-DEGREE LEADERS PRACTICE TO LEAD ACROSS

“Leaders must be able to lead other leaders – not just those below them, but also those above and alongside them.”

This means leaders in the middle are effectively leaders of leaders. To succeed leading in this way, it is critical to help peers win.

Lead-Across Principle #1

As mentioned earlier, leadership is an ongoing process that takes time and energy. This is especially true when working with peers. The term “leadership loop” contains the following seven elements: caring, learning, appreciating, contributing, verbalizing, leading, and succeeding. The challenge here is to practice all of these components to help others succeed without taking short cuts. The leadership loop needs to be addressed constantly to lead across the organization successfully.

Lead-Across Principle #2

Rather than competing with fellow leaders, good leaders will work to complete projects with them. While competition can be healthy, competing with peers can hurt an entire team. Teamwork and competition together are a powerful force, when what is being done is not a battle between team members, but a way to complete each person.

By channeling competition, leaders and their teams can win as a whole, garner mutual respect, gain credibility and exert influence.

Lead-Across Principle #3

No matter how people perceive their coworkers or team mates and no matter how competitive the atmosphere, everyone needs to have a friend at work. Being a friend not only creates a foundation of influence, but it provides a framework for success. In the workplace, if the goal is to be a friend, rather than to find a friend, chances are good of leading across the organization successfully. Being a friend means listening, being available, finding common ground, maintaining a sense of humor, and being truthful when others aren’t.

Lead-Across Principle #4

Leaders across the organization must avoid office politics. When leaders play the politics game, they alienate their peers. Office politics may mean constantly changing positions to get on the winning side or using people for selfish personal gain. In the long run, integrity, consistency, and productivity always pay off. To avoid office politics, it’s smart to stay away from idle gossip and petty arguments. The 360-Degree Leader will succeed when cultivating the ability to stand up for what’s right and to build trust with people despite tremendous pressure. Diplomacy with peers encourages effectiveness and influence in leadership.

Lead-Across Principle #5

While it’s much easier to remain in environments where we are secure, it’s important for leaders to expand their circle of acquaintances regularly. The result is exposure to new ideas. Leaders expanding their realm of relationships move beyond their inner circle, expertise, strengths, prejudices, and routines.

Lead-Across Principle #6

All 360-Degree Leaders need to recognize when to resist fighting for their own ideas and let the best ideas win. This means listening, being open to new ideas, and protecting creative people’s initiatives. They cannot always let their personality overshadow their purpose, nor can they afford to take rejection personally.
Lead-Across Principle #7

Many leaders try very hard to make others think they are perfect. This is not a winning strategy for being a 360-Degree Leader. It's more effective to admit faults, worry less about what people think, put away pride, and be open to learning from others.

“Pride is really nothing more than a form of selfishness, and pretense is only a way to keep people at arm’s length so that they can’t see who you really are. Instead of impressing others, let them impress you,” says Maxwell.

PART V: THE PRINCIPLES 360-DEGREE LEADERS PRACTICE TO LEAD DOWN

Leaders who lead down help people realize their potential, become a strong role model, and encourage others to become part of a higher purpose.

Lead-Down Principle #1

First and foremost, 360-Degree leaders need to walk the halls, connect with people, and be visible and approachable. Leaders can be seen as inaccessible, which only reduces their influence over their team. Leaders express that they care, and pay attention to others while creating a healthy balance between personal and professional interest.

Lead-Down Principle #2

The way 360-Degree Leaders get more out of people is because they see them as who they can become and then show respect for them. These leaders’ beliefs in their people inspire the team to believe in themselves and encourage positive growth. These leaders cannot afford to reward bad performance but still need to treat people with dignity and respect, which most often encourages people to rise to their leader’s expectations.

Lead-Down Principle #3

Exceptional leaders develop their people so that those people get the job done at the highest level. Development means helping people improve as individuals, whether it’s teaching more effective time management or cultivating discipline. Development is a long-term process, and in order for leaders to continue developing their team, they need to continue growing themselves. Development is based on individual needs which involves finding out about each person’s dreams and aspirations. Developing everyone differently while keeping to organizational goals will help people to grow and reach their full potential.

Lead-Down Principle #4

Successful leaders find strength zones in their people. If employees are continually asked to work in their areas of weakness, they will quickly become demoralized and less productive.

First, leaders need to determine each employee’s strengths. Second, they must give them the right job, and third; identify the skills people must have to be a success. Then it is the leader’s responsibility to provide high-quality, world-class training so people are equipped to win.

Lead-Down Principle #5

Leaders have an impact on others by being a consistent role model. Leader behavior and attitude determine the culture and atmosphere of the organization. Leader decisions must be consistent with their values; leader character fosters trust, and leader work ethics set the tone for increased productivity. Consequently, followers will become like their leaders, and this is why being a strong and consistent role model counts.

Lead-Down Principle #6

Those leading down the organization must be interpreters of their vision and transfer that vision in a way that will inspire and lead people in the right direction. Therefore, the vision must be clear to maintain focus, connect with the past, present, and future, rather than solely on the future. Another way to keep people on target is to ensure they understand the purpose, keep their responsibilities challenging and motivate with passion. By engaging people in this manner, 360-Degree Leaders can successfully transfer their vision.

Lead-Down Principle #7:

“Whatever action leaders reward will be repeated.”
Leaders need to give praise both publicly and privately, and with a concrete reward. This usually means a salary raise. It’s also important that not everyone is rewarded in the same way because someone may be twice as productive as someone else. The old saying of “you get what you pay for” is absolutely the case. Therefore, smart leaders promote and reward their people whenever possible.

PART VI: THE VALUE OF 360-DEGREE LEADERS

No matter how many leaders an organization has, it always needs more 360-Degree ones to add value to the company. Good leaders build teams by being willing to hire people better than themselves, staying secure in their own roles, and by listening. The ongoing development of strong teams enables members of these groups to be leaders at every organizational level.

When people lead successfully at one level, they are usually qualified to step up to the next level. The key to emerge as a good leader at a higher level is to be cognizant of good leadership in the present.

Effective leaders in the middle of an organization usually make better leaders at the top. These people are often closer to the workers and know more about what is happening. They can transfer this knowledge to top leaders and also influence those at lower levels. When middle leaders use their influence to help top leaders, those top leaders can do more than they could do by themselves, because they’re enabled to focus on their own priorities, spurring continued growth.

Tomorrow’s leaders will generate new ideas, solve problems, take risks, and spot new opportunities. Every organization needs 360-Degree Leaders, people who can lead in every direction: up, across, and down. The qualities 360-Degree possess include adaptability, discernment, perspective, communication, security, resourcefulness, maturity, endurance, and the ability always to be counted on.

A chapter-by-chapter summary and a bibliography are provided.

Remarks

Leaders help people succeed. Organizations depend on leadership for them to be successful, and they must have 360-Degree Leaders. These leaders make an impact no matter where they are in the organization. Being a 360-Degree Leader is about winning respect and influencing peers to build a successful team environment. People can usually trace their successes and failures to the relationships in their lives. The quality of the relationship people have with their leaders impacts this success or failure, and is certainly worth the investment.

With the clarity of a teacher and the passion of a seasoned leadership coach, Maxwell leads managers through the principles of the 360-Degree Leader. The result is a handbook on how to flourish when leading from the middle. With numerous quotes and examples from effective domestic and international leaders, Maxwell takes executives on a realistic journey to become a 360-Degree Leader.

There are many wise and relevant tools available in this book that can be used to aid people in this ongoing process.

The 360-Degree Leader is a tremendous resource for people at every level of the enterprise.

Reading Suggestions

Reading Time: 10-12 Hours, 320 Pages in Book

John C. Maxwell recommends that readers complete the assessment of their skills at www.360-DegreeLeader.com. What is offered there is a simple, straightforward online questionnaire that asks people to rate themselves on issues related to leadership in three different areas. From this questionnaire, people can download a lengthy report of results.

At the end of each part of the book is a review summarizing the key points of the previous chapter, useful for quick reference and as valuable talking points when encouraging and emphasizing the importance of the 360-Degree Leader. For a quick look at the all-around qualities
necessary to become a 360-Degree Leader, refer to the values discussed in part VI.

At the end of the book is a special section that encourages frustrated leaders to create an environment where people thrive and make an organization great. The pointers in this section will help develop 360-Degree Leaders in any organization. This section summarizes much of what is covered in the previous chapters and can be a useful reference for anyone wanting a “refresher course”.

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A Note to Our Readers

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ISSN 0741-8132