

Leadership Is an Art by Max De Pree, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1987 (46 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. A Leader Is a Servant Removing Obstacles

The art of leadership, as Max says, is “liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible.” Thus, the leader is the “servant” of his followers in that he removes the obstacles that prevent them from doing their jobs. In short, the true leader enables his or her followers to realize their full potential. (p. xxii)

2. Leadership Is Relationships

Leadership is an art, something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books. Leadership is more tribal than scientific, more a weaving of relationships than an amassing of information, and, in that sense, I don’t know how to pin it down in every detail. (p. 3)

3. Diversity of People’s Gifts

In our effort to understand corporate life, what is it we should learn from this story? In addition to all of the ratios and goals and parameters and bottom lines, it is fundamental that leaders endorse a concept of persons. This begins with an understanding of the diversity of people’s gifts and talents and skills. (p. 9)

4. Leadership Is Enabling People’s Gifts

When we think about leaders and the variety of gifts people bring to corporations and institutions, we see that the art of leadership lies in polishing and liberating and enabling those gifts. (p. 10)

5. Defining Reality

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader. (p. 11)

6. Leaders Bear Pain

A friend of mine characterizes leaders simply like this: “Leaders don’t inflict pain; they bear pain.” (p. 11)

7. Leadership Knows the Pulse of the Body

The measure of leadership is not the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do they achieve the required results? Do they change with grace? Manage conflict? (p. 12)

8. Nurturing Future Leaders

Leaders are also responsible for future leadership. They need to identify, develop, and nurture future leaders. (p. 14)

9. Meeting Needs of Others

Corporations, like the people who compose them, are always in a state of becoming. Covenants bind people together and enable them to meet their corporate needs by meeting the needs of one another. We must do this in a way that is consonant with the world around us. (p. 15)

10. Making a Meaningful Difference

To be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead. (p. 22)

11. Participative Management

I believe that the most effective contemporary management process is participative management. Participative management is glibly discussed these days in a number of magazines and books, but it is not a theoretical position to be adopted after studying a few journals. It begins with a belief in the potential of people. Participative management without a belief in that potential and without convictions about the gifts people bring to organizations is a contradiction in terms.

Participative management arises out of the heart and out of a personal philosophy about people. It cannot be added to, or subtracted from, a corporate policy manual as though it were one more managerial tool.

Everyone has the right and the duty to influence decision making and to understand the results. Participative management guarantees that decisions will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning. Participative management is not democratic. Having a say differs from having a vote.

Effective influencing and understanding spring largely from healthy relationships among the members of the group. Leaders need to foster environments and work processes within which people can develop high-quality relationships—relationships with each other, relationships with the group with which we work, relationships with our clients and customers. (p. 24)

12. Single Points of View

The Polish government once announced that they were going to “initiate strict meat rationing in order to restore faith in socialism.” The Iraqi government once sent envoys to twenty nations to explain their country’s peaceful attitude “before and during the war.” Obvious contradictions like these often spring from a shortsightedness, a

preoccupation with one's own point of view. There is danger in considering a single point of view. (p. 31)

13. Work – One of Our Greatest Privileges

For many of us who work, there exists an exasperating discontinuity between how we see ourselves as persons and how we see ourselves as workers. We need to eliminate that sense of discontinuity and to restore a sense of coherence in our lives.

Work should be and can be productive and rewarding, meaningful and maturing, enriching and fulfilling, healing and joyful. Work is one of our greatest privileges. Work can even be poetic. (p. 32)

14. Pre-Intimidated

My wife's brother happens to be Jim Kaat. For twenty-five years, he was a great major-league pitcher. In the mid-sixties, he had a memorable opportunity of pitching against the famous Sandy Koufax in the World Series.

Once I asked Jim about Koufax's greatness. He explained that Koufax was unusually talented, was beautifully disciplined and trained. "In Fact," he said, "Koufax was the only major-league pitcher whose fastball could be heard to hum. Opposing batters, instead of being noisily active in their dugout, would sit silently and listen for that fastball to hum. They would then take their turn at the plate already intimidated." (p. 34)

15. Team Needs Met by Meeting Individual Needs

In baseball and business, the needs of the team are best met when we meet the needs of individual persons. By conceiving a vision and pursuing it together, we can solve our problems of effectiveness and productivity, and we may at the same time fundamentally alter the concept of work. (p. 35)

16. Systems of Input and Response

We need a system of input—leaders must arrange for involvement on everybody's part.

We need a system of response—leaders must make that involvement genuine. A great error is to invite people to be involved and to contribute their ideas and then to exclude them from the evaluation, the decision-making process, and the implementation. (p. 36)

17. Clear Responsibility Lines Drawn

Essential to good understanding is that leaders clarify the responsibility of each member of the group. These and other elements of the right to understanding obligate leaders to communicate, to educate, and to evaluate. (p. 40)

18. Leadership Doing Nothing

It was Easter Sunday morning and the large church was filled. The processional was ready to begin. The three pastors, the senior choir, two children's choirs poised at the back of the church-weeks of planning and preparation were about to be fulfilled.

As the organist struck the first chord, a middle-aged man in the center of the church began to sweat profusely, turned an ashen gray, rose partially out of his seat, stopped breathing, and toppled over onto his daughter sitting next to him.

And what did these pastors, organists, and choirs do? They did nothing. (p. 45)

19. Roving Leadership

The point in telling you this story is to show that while this church has a hierarchy of more than thirty appointed and elected professionals, committee members, board members, and others, the hierarchy did not respond swiftly or decisively. It is difficult for a hierarchy to allow "subordinates" to break custom and be leaders. The people who *did* respond swiftly and effectively are roving leaders. Roving leaders are those indispensable people in our lives who are there when we need them. Roving leaders take charge, in varying degrees, in a lot of companies every day.

More than simple initiative, roving leadership is a key element in the day-to-day expression of a participative process. Participation is the opportunity and responsibility to have a say in your job, to have influence over the management of organizational resources based on your own competence and your willingness to accept problem ownership. No one person is the "expert" at everything.

In many organizations there are two kinds of leaders- both hierarchical leaders and roving leaders. In special situations, the hierarchical leader is obliged to identify the roving leader, then to support and follow him or her, and also to exhibit the grace that enables the roving leader to lead.

It's not easy to let someone else take the lead. To do this demands a special openness and the ability to recognize what is best for the organization and how best to respond to a given issue. Roving leadership is an issue oriented idea. Roving leadership is the expression of the ability of hierarchical leaders to permit others to share ownership of problems-in effect, to take possession of a situation. (p. 47)

20. Working Together

When we think about the people with whom we work, people on whom we depend, we can see that without each individual, we are not going to go very far as a group. By ourselves we suffer serious limitations. Together we can be something wonderful. (p. 50)

21. Reaching Potential, Not Goals

It is not a matter primarily of whether or not we reach our particular goals. Life is more than just reaching our goals. As individuals and as a group we need to reach our potential. Nothing else is good enough. We must always be reaching toward our potential. (p. 50)

22. Enable Your People

Intimacy is betrayed by the inability of our leaders to focus and provide continuity and momentum. It is betrayed by finding complexity where simplicity ought to be. Leaders who encumber people rather than enabling them betray intimacy. (p. 56)

23. Legalistic Thinking Induces Paralysis

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, speaking to the 1978 graduating class of Harvard College, said this about legalistic relationships: "A society based on the letter of the law and never reaching any higher, fails to take advantage of the full range of human possibilities. The letter of the law is too cold and formal to have a beneficial influence on society. Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relationships, this creates an atmosphere of spiritual mediocrity that paralyzes men's noblest impulses." And later: "After a certain level of the problem has been reached, legalistic thinking induces paralysis; it prevents one from seeing the scale and the meaning of events." (*A World Split Apart*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978, pp. 17-19,39.)

24. Covenantal Relationships Induces Freedom

Covenantal relationships, on the other hand, induce freedom, not paralysis. A covenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals, and to management processes. Words such as love, warmth, personal chemistry are certainly pertinent. Covenantal relationships are open to influence. They fill deep needs and they enable work to have meaning and to be fulfilling. Covenantal relationships reflect unity and grace and poise. They are an expression of the sacred nature of relationships.

Covenantal relationships enable corporations to be hospitable to the unusual person and unusual ideas. Covenantal relationships tolerate risk and forgive errors. I am convinced that the best management process for today's environment is participative management based on covenantal relationships. Look for the "good goods" of quality relationships that prevail in a corporation as you seek to serve. (p. 59)

25. Everyone Brings an Offering

The aim is to embody the concept of persons, for a substantial concept of persons must underlie an inclusive system. A belief that every person brings an offering to a group requires us to include as many people as possible. Including people, if we

believe in the intrinsic value of their diversity, will be the only path open to us. (p. 65)

26. We Are Interdependent

An inclusive system requires us to be insiders. We are interdependent, really unable to be productive by ourselves. Interdependency requires lavish communications. Lavish communications and an exclusive process are contradictory.

One can define this inclusive approach in three ways. First, there are always certain marks of being included:

- Being needed
- Being involved
- Being cared about as an individual
- Fair wages and benefits
- Having the opportunity to do one's best (Only leaders willing to take risks can give this opportunity.)
- Having the opportunity to understand
- Having a piece of the action—productivity gains, profit sharing, ownership appreciation, seniority bonus (p. 67)

27. Corporate Concept of Persons

It is more difficult, but far more important, to be committed to a corporate concept of persons, the diversity of human gifts, covenantal relationships, lavish communications, including everyone, and believing that leadership is a condition of indebtedness. (p. 72)

28. Open to Giants

There are at least two things we learn about corporations from these tales of giants. The first is that while productivity is important, giving space to giants is much more important. The second is that giving space to giants lets them and others practice the “roving leadership” I discussed earlier. These two lessons may, from time to time, be hard on the hierarchical leadership. But if you want a corporation to be truly effective, you will need to help corporations be open to giants at all levels. (p. 79)

29. Not Forgetting Who You Are

Dr. Carl Frost, a good friend and adviser to our company, tells a story of his experience in Nigeria during the late sixties.

Electricity had just been brought into the village where he and his family were living. Each family got a single light in its hut. A real sign of progress. The trouble was that at night, though they had nothing to read and many of them did not know how to read, the families would sit in their huts in awe of this wonderful symbol of technology.

The light-bulb watching began to replace the customary nighttime gatherings by the tribal fire, where the tribal storytellers, the elders, would pass along the history of the tribe. The tribe was losing its history in the light of a few electric bulbs.

This story helps to illustrate the difference between scientific management and tribal leadership. Every family, every college, every corporation, every institution needs tribal storytellers. The penalty for failing to listen is to lose one's history, one's historical context, one's binding values. Like the Nigerian tribe, without the continuity brought by custom, any group of people will begin to forget who they are. (p. 81)

30. Quality

We are dedicated to quality. Quality, as D.J., my father, has said, is a matter of truth. When we talk about quality, we are talking about quality of product and of service. But we are also talking about the quality of our relationships and the quality of our communications and the quality of our promises to each other. And so, it is reasonable to think about quality in terms of truth and integrity.

My dictionary, when defining the word integrity, recommends looking up the word honor. Among many choices, there is the phrase: "A fine sense of one's obligations." This, I believe, is the way to look at quality. (p. 84)

31. Gifts and Talents Each Have

When we think of corporate diversity, we think about the gifts and talents and commitment that each of us as individuals bring to the group effort. Channeled correctly and integrated properly, our diversity can be our greatest strength. But there is always the temptation to use these gifts for our personal benefit rather than dedicating them to the best interest of the group. If used selfishly, they will cause serious internal erosion. The process of integration is simply abandoning oneself to the strengths of others, being vulnerable to what others can do better than we can. (p. 88)

32. Compensating for Doubt

A story I once heard illustrates this idea. A friend of mine used to teach in Harlem. He thought it might be a good idea to take these city kids out to the country for a week at camp. One of the first things he did, not unnaturally, was to organize a baseball game.

A curious thing happened. Nobody would play in the outfield. He soon discovered the reason for this: The outfield was surrounded by the woods where all sorts of unknown dangers lay. My friend assigned two kids to each outfield position. One would hold the glove; one would watch the woods. Each person and each duty was essential. And the game went on. (p. 96)

33. Employee Owners

Employee stock ownership is essential to a declaration of identity. Motivation is not a significant problem: Herman Miller employees bring that with them by the bushel. But people need to be liberated, to be involved, to be accountable, and to reach for their potential. We believe that more and more working owners are winning the struggle for identity and meaning against anonymity and frustration. (p. 97)

34. Becoming What We Need to Be

It is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are. (p. 100)

35. Employee Ownership

The capitalist system cannot avoid being better off by having more employees who act as if they own the place. (p. 100)

36. Good Communication Means Respect

Good communication is not simply sending and receiving. Nor is good communication simply a mechanical exchange of data. No matter how good the communication, if no one listens all is lost.

At the root, communication and one of its forms, language, are commitments to a convention, a culture. Dishonest or careless communication tells us as much about the people involved as it does about anything else. Communication is an ethical question. Good communication means a respect for individuals. (p. 102)

37. The Right to Know Is Basic

A number of obligations go along with good communication. We must understand that access to pertinent information is essential to getting a job done. The right to know is basic. Moreover, it is better to err on the side of sharing too much information than risk leaving someone in the dark. Information is power, but it is pointless power if hoarded. Power must be shared for an organization or a relationship to work. (p. 104)

38. Signs of Impending Deterioration

One of the important things leaders need to learn is to recognize the signals of impending deterioration.

I have made a list of these signals over the years. As you read this list, remember that many people in large organizations relish apathy. They often fail to see the signs of entropy:

- A tendency towards superficiality
- A dark tension among key people

- No longer having time for celebration and ritual
- A growing feeling that rewards and goals are the same thing
- When people stop telling tribal stories or cannot understand them
- A recurring effort by some to convince others that business is, after all, quite simple (The acceptance of complexity and ambiguity and the ability to deal with them constructively are essential.)
- When people begin to have different understandings of words like “responsibility” or “service” or “trust”
- When problem-makers outnumber problem-solvers
- When folks confuse heroes and celebrities
- Leaders who seek to control rather than liberate
- When the pressures of day-to-day operations push aside our concern for vision and risk (I think you know that vision and risk can never be separated.)
- An orientation toward the dry rules of business school rather than a value orientation that takes into account such things as contribution, spirit, excellence, beauty, and joy
- When people speak of customers as impositions on their time rather than as opportunities to serve
- Manuals
- The urge to establish ratios
- Leaders who rely on structures instead of people
- A loss of confidence in judgment, experience, and wisdom
- A loss of grace and style and civility (p. 111)

39. Some Job Responsibilities Not Black and White

For jobs easily described and work easily measured, there are good procedures to follow in corporations and institutions. But many jobs, especially those entailing responsibility for leadership of the corporation or institution, are not black-and-white, cannot be measured easily, and must be examined over long periods of time. (p. 114)

40. Trusting One Another

I recently led a discussion group of about fifteen people at Herman Miller. We had introduced a "just in time" inventory-management program. One of the women in the group asked if I understood and was committed to this program. My answer was that I did not understand it completely but was committed to its success. This gave her pause. She was trying to figure out a tactful way of asking me how that could possibly be true.

When I asked her what her job was, she said that she worked in the engineering department. "How are things going there?" I asked. "Just fine," she said. I asked her if I

should be comfortable about what was going on in the engineering department, and she told me that, by and large, I could be.

Then I asked if she was comfortable about the way I was doing my job. She told me that she was.

Catching the drift of the conversation, she added quickly that she did not understand everything I did. It was quite easy for the two of us, under the watchful eyes of the group, to agree that it was not necessary for us to understand completely what the other did or was accountable for. We could nevertheless, be wholeheartedly committed to each other's role and each other's success.

As the group talked this idea over, we realized that, while understanding is an essential part of organized activity, it just is not possible for everybody to know every thing and understand everything. The following is essential: We must trust one another to be accountable for our own assignments. When that kind of trust is present, it is a beautifully liberating thing. (p. 115)

41. Seven Sins of the World

Finally, I think there is value in considering thoughts from other leaders, leaders not necessarily in the same area as one's own. Mahatma Gandhi once wrote that there were seven sins in the world: wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humanity; worship without sacrifice; politics without principle. Performance considered in light of those seven sins would be a well-reviewed performance indeed. (p. 120)

42. Future Leaders

Second, the organization requires several things from the people chose to be candidates for future leaders. These people must bring to their responsibilities certain characteristics, traits that should be present in all leaders, traits talked about in this book. A future leader

- has consistent and dependable integrity
- cherishes heterogeneity and diversity
- searches out competence
- is open to contrary opinion
- communicates easily at all levels
- understands the concept of equity and consistently advocates it
- leads through serving
- is vulnerable to the skills and talents of others
- is intimate with the organization and its work
- is able to see the broad picture (beyond his own area of focus)
- is a spokesperson and diplomat

- can be a tribal storyteller (an important way of transmitting our corporate culture)
- tells *why* rather than *how* (p. 131)

43. Visionary Leadership

- The only kind of leadership worth following is based on vision
- Personal character must be uppermost
- If we are going to ask a person to lead, can we determine ahead of time whether he or she has gaps between belief and practice, between work and family?
- When talking about leadership, one always ends up talking about the future, about leaving a legacy, about followers. In other words, leadership intertwines the most important aspects of an organization: its people and its future. We need, therefore, to proceed very slowly and carefully.
- When choosing officers, provide for possible failure and graceful withdrawal. Promotion to officership should be decided in a group, with no slim majority. The process should include complete commitment and no reservations. After all, the way we move managers around, you may inherit a work team that you cannot, or will not want to lead.
- What does the person's peers have to say?
- Would you seek out this person as a key resource on an important task force? (p. 133)

44. Think Beyond the Whole

A short-term look at the financial status of a corporation or a dependence on immediate financial results will lead to a partial and perhaps twisted view of the whole picture. A crucial element may be missing. We may not be running the entire race. A friend of mine described a colleague as great at running the "ninety-five yard dash." That is a distinction I can do without. Lacking the last five yards makes the first ninety-five pointless.

Once again, I found myself brought up short by someone who pointed out to me that I had only part of the picture. Curt Shosten, a panel assembler at Herman Miller, heard me tell the story of the "ninety-five-yard dash" and wrote to complete the thought. He explained that serious runners think of it as a *110-yard* dash so that no one will beat you in the last few yards. That completes this idea nicely. Think beyond the whole.

Parts are often mistaken for wholes. Ideas are viewed as complete when they are incomplete. Relationships are considered well formed when they are insufficiently formed. Values are taken for final statements when, in fact, they are only beginnings. Were these parts recognized for what they are, and were we to work toward their

completion-were we to keep "becoming" as individuals-we would be better off as persons, as corporations, and as institutions. (p. 142)

45. Marks of Elegant Leaders

Elegant leaders always reach for completeness. What are some of the marks of elegance? What should leaders be searching for in their efforts to liberate people of high potential? The following ideas are some of the things that one needs to understand to be an elegant leader.

Contracts are a small part of relationships. A complete relationship needs a covenant. Intelligence and education can ascertain the facts. Wisdom can discover the truth. The life of corporation needs both.

To give one's time doesn't always mean giving one's involvement. Hierarchy and equality are not mutually exclusive. Hierarchy provides connections. Equality makes hierarchy responsive and responsible.

Without forgiveness, there can be no real freedom to act within a group. Opportunity must always be connected to accountability. This is not something hopelessly idealistic. Without the promise of accountability, there are no true opportunities and risks. Without true opportunity and risk, there is no chance to seize accountability; it will remain elsewhere.

A whale is as unique as a cactus. But don't ask a whale to survive Death Valley. We all have special gifts. Where we use them and how determines whether we actually complete something.

Goals and rewards are only parts, different parts, of human activity. When rewards become our goals, we are only pursuing part of our work. Goals are to be pursued. In healthy and rational relationships, rewards complete the process by bringing joy. Joy is an essential ingredient of leadership. Leaders are obligated to provide it.

These are my marks of elegance. (p. 144)

46. Leadership Is an Art

Leadership is much more an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice. (p. 148)