

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP - Module 2

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# Becoming a Better Leader

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 THE BUSINESS SOURCE

**Marty M. Fahnce:** Welcome everyone to The Business Source audio recordings. My name is Marty M. Fahnce, and I would like to thank you all for joining us for today's recording. The topic for today is Leadership.

Today we are speaking with a true leadership expert, Mark Sanborn. In fact, in a worldwide survey conducted by Leadership Gurus International, Mark was named as one of the world's top leadership gurus.

He is the recipient of the Cabot Award, the National Speaker Association's highest honor. Mark is president of Sanborn and Associates, Inc., an idea studio dedicated to developing leaders.

He is the best-selling author of The Fred Factor and You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader.

Mark Sanborn, welcome, and thank you for joining us.

**Mark**

**Sanborn:** Thanks Marty. It's great to be with you.

**Marty:** We sure appreciate you taking some time to share your knowledge and expertise with our Business Source audience.

I would like to get right to the questions if you don't mind.

**Mark:** That's great.

**Marty:** Fantastic. First of all in your book, You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader, one of the messages I got was that everyone has the ability to make a difference.

Can you share a few stories that illustrate how we can all make a real impact whether we are at an intermediate or senior level in our organization?

**Mark:** I would like to even expand beyond that and say everyone not only can make a difference, but everyone does make a difference.

I think too often in organizations either as employees or leaders we buy in to this cultural myth that we *can* make a difference, which subtly suggests that we can also choose not to, that we can somehow be neutral.

I have found that in the marketplace of human affairs in any business anywhere in the world that neutrality is always interpreted as indifference. Indifference says, "You don't count enough for me to invest my time or my energy to engage with."



I think the better question that leaders should ask themselves and leaders should ask their people is not “Did you make a difference today?” but “What kind of difference did you make?”

“Did you add to what we are about here, or did you take away from it? Did you enrich the experience of a customer, or did you diminish it? Did you build a coworker up, or did you tear a coworker down?”

So everybody makes a difference.

The second I think subtle but important nuance is that we tend to think in leadership terms as a leader being someone with a title, what I call a “Big L” leader. Certainly that is one kind of leadership.

If you have been charged with the ongoing responsibility of leading other people then that is Big L leadership; that is your job.

What I think is often less understood is that every person in any organization has the opportunity to be a “Little L” leader. You may not have the formal responsibility of leading on an ongoing basis, but during the course of a typical business day, during the course of their typical work, they choose to positively influence something about what they do.

In my book [You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader](#) I talk about ROI, and of course we are all familiar with ROI as return on investment. But I repurpose that because I believe the way that you increase return on investment is by getting everybody, whether they are a Big L leader or a Little L leader involved in increasing relationships, outcomes, and improvements.

Building better relationships is the “R” in that acronym. Enriching the outcome that coworkers and customers experience is the “O.” Of course the “I” is increasing improvements either by suggesting improvements and/or implementing them.

I know that is a long preface to your original question: “Can you give us some stories?” I wanted your listeners to have a context for how they think about leadership.

One of the stories that comes to mind is a guy that as far as I know is still a short order cook at a hotel in downtown Chicago. I stayed at this hotel several years ago. I went through the breakfast buffet line, and I ordered an omelet from this person whose name was Curtis.



Curtis whipped up the omelet that I ordered, but when he went to serve the omelet, he picked up a cold plate off the serving line, and he said, “You know, no omelet this good should be served on a cold plate,” and he said, “Give me just a second.”

He took the plate and he put it on an open burner for maybe ten or fifteen seconds. He warmed the plate; he served the omelet. What is interesting is I don’t remember much about how the omelet tasted. It obviously was okay or I would remember if it wasn’t.

What I remembered was that little extra effort that he, Curtis, took to improve the outcome I experienced that day at that hotel. That to me, even though it is a small thing, is a great example of leadership whether it is a Little L or a Big L: being, improving a relationship and outcome or an improvement for someone that we serve or do business with.

That reminds me of another story: a bus driver in Kentucky. All the other bus drivers come back from their morning pick ups. It is a cold morning, and this guy doesn’t have a jacket on. Other bus drivers are kind of making fun of him. “Why did you forget your coat?”

He takes it in stride; he is good-natured about it. The Superintendent happens to be walking by. She starts to talk to the bus driver and finds out that he had driven some kids to a field trip. One of the little girls on the bus had forgotten her jacket, so the bus driver gave his jacket to her.

Again, a lovely example of what I think is some of the best kinds of leadership when you do something nice, something that improves the experience that another person has.

Of course if your listeners have read my book [You Don’t Need a Title to be a Leader](#), I talk about a guy named Shawn Green. He was a cadet at the United States Air Force Academy. He had no particular power, no particular title other than his class year at the academy.

Several years ago he called me out of the blue and said, “We have had some challenges here. I decided there is something I could do to help make a difference. I would like to ask you and Stephen Covey to come speak at the Academy to our students. I don’t have any budget. Would you do it for free?”

I really admired Cadet Green’s initiative because even though Stephen Covey and I have significant speaking fees, we both recognized that



this was an opportunity to do a good thing. As a result of Cadet Shawn Green, we both spoke on the program and hopefully made a little difference through the remarks that we shared.

Those are all examples of leadership with or without a title, how any of us can increase our ROI by building better relationships and enriching outcomes, and suggesting and implementing improvements.

**Marty:** Well those are some great examples. Thank you for those. They have a lot of insight that really shows that they don't need a title. They just need the initiative and put themselves in that role of being a leader without permission even.

**Mark:** Leadership is not about your title. It is about what you do. Titles, when used correctly, confirm leadership. They never bestow it. Just because you have a title unfortunately doesn't necessarily mean that you are a leader.

But also just because you don't have a title shouldn't prevent you from leading.

**Marty:** Great, great feedback.

Let's talk about some of the ways that we can improve our leadership skills and help improve our organizations and enhance our careers. I believe in your book you mentioned six specific things that can help you become a better leader.

**Mark:** Yes, I talk about six skills, and if your listeners would like to download a virtual handout, it is free, and they can go to [www.YouDontNeedaTitle.com](http://www.YouDontNeedaTitle.com). They can find these six skills that I am going to talk about for the next few minutes.

These six skills are based on about 22 years of working directly in leadership development as well as my own experience prior to that in corporate America and working with organizations.

I have found that all leaders have their own style, but that the substance of leadership is common across a lot of different situations. I found more often that not leaders were able to effectively and positively influence by developing these six skills.

The only one that is really linear is the first skill, and that is self mastery. I believe nobody wants to follow anybody that isn't worth following. That is to say we have to first take responsibility for our own lives before we



can expect somebody else to entrust their follower-ship to us.

I have come to believe that we all exist as an example, and the key is to be a good example. I think that sometimes we see people in the media or in our organizations, and we don't think of them as examples, but they are, and they are kind of a big red flag that says, "Don't do this. Don't be this way. Don't treat people this way."

The real power of leadership comes from being the kind of person that is worth following, that somebody else would like to be like. That is what self mastery is. It is taking responsibility for one's own life.

That means not that we control everything that happens. As a matter of fact, most of what happens in the course of a typical business day may well be beyond our control: the price of gas, the economy, consumer spending, and the problems that we have to handle that somebody else created.

Taking responsibility doesn't necessarily mean we are responsible for what happened, but we are always responsible for how we respond, or for how we deal with a situation. That is the first skill.

The second skill is the ability to create shared focus. My formal degree and background is economics, so I am sort of a left-brain thinker; I am a numbers guy.

I have come to believe, and this isn't the kind of thing you would expect to hear an economist say, but money isn't really a resource. Money is first a by-product of how you invest the only three resources you have as a leader. Those resources are number one, your time; number two, your expertise; number three, the time and expertise of the people that you lead.

Within an organization before we ever have money, we have an idea and someone who is willing to act on the idea. Is that successful? Then it is two, three, four, twenty, one hundred, a thousand people.

What often happens in leadership over time is we start to create revenue from our time and expertise and the time and expertise of others. We start treating money like the true resource instead of our time and expertise and the time and expertise of our team members.

What a leader does first for him or herself is first they are very clear on what are their MVP activities. Of course that stands not for most valuable player but most valuable and profitable activities.



That means that out of the 159 things that you do in a day, Marty, there are probably six or eight or ten, no more, that give you the biggest payback on your investment of time and expertise.

Leaders have done the hard work of sorting through the significant and the insignificant, and they focus every day at spending more time on their MVP activities, their most valuable and profitable activities.

A good leader who leads others goes a step further and makes sure that everybody on the team is focused on what the most valuable and profitable activities are. There is no wasted time and no wasted expertise.

It is not just enough to be focused, although if you are focused you will be productive. It is the ability to create shared focus that is so important to leadership.

The third skill is power with people. Management is power over people. As a manager you can demand compliance, but if somebody is doing what you want them to do because they have to, you are not really leading. You are just creating compliance.

Leadership is always based on commitment. Commitment comes from doing what needs to be done because you want to do it, because you trust the person who is asking you to do it because you see how it fits into the bigger picture.

That is probably the Achilles tendon for so many leaders today is that the ability to build relationships with the people that they lead.

Back a few years ago, my first job out of college, my assistant's name was Terri. We had a client in our office, and I was giving the client an office tour. In my naïve enthusiasm, when I introduced Terri I said to the client, "This is Terri; she works for me."

Of course there was a little ego there because I had never had an employee before. I will never forget. Terri looked me in the eye and said, "Mark, I work with you, not for you."

Now if I were king of the world I wish she would have shared that little insight after the client left, but it was a good insight. Really everybody works with us.

The org chart shows the relationship between people and departments



and responsibilities. If a person has this mentality that a person works for them, they are probably going to have a hard time building a relationship and creating commitment. That is really what this third skill is. It is power with people.

The fourth skill is persuasive communication. I find that managers tell but leaders sell. Selling and telling are two different things. Telling is just presenting information and letting other people decide. Selling is positive influence.

I always define, and I don't know who originally said this, but I always define ethical selling as helping people make a decision that is good for them.

That is really what leaders do. They have good ideas that are good for the people who follow them, for their organizations, and they sell people on those ideas. They don't just expect people to instantly see the point or the value. They sell; they don't just tell. That is really the essence of persuasive communication.

The fifth key is strategic execution. Back in November of 2007, *BusinessWeek* had an online article, and the headline I thought was pretty telling. It said "Perform or Perish."

Today it is about creating results. Sometimes at the end of a speech someone will come up to me out of the audience and say, "You know, I have heard all of that before."

I don't care. I am not trying to be flip, but the question isn't "Do you know it?" The question is "Are you doing it?" I mean I know a whole lot more than I do every day. If I didn't have the stuff I knew I should be doing, I would probably be on a yacht right now in the Bahamas drinking tequila.

It is not a lack of information that hurts us; it is a lack of application. Today it is about the ability to create results. That is what strategic execution is. It is the distance between what you plan to do and what you actually accomplish. It is the difference between common knowledge and consistent application.

Finally number six, and this is probably the most overlooked part of leadership, and that is service. I believe that if you ever do anything that only you benefit, that was not an act of leadership but of ambition. I have got no problem with that. I don't think there is anything inherently wrong with ambition.



However, true leadership always benefits more than just the leader. It benefits the leader, the follower, the community, the customer, and it always benefits the larger group as a whole.

Service is really about more than putting back in what you took out. I hear business people say all the time “I want to put as much back in to the system as I took out.”

I am an economist, and that is not contribution. That is barter. Quid pro quo; you are even-Steven. It is when you put more in than you took out that you have truly contributed.

Thirty years ago Robert Greenleaf wrote a book that became a classic, and it was a novel idea in corporate America then. It is less of a novel idea today, but that doesn't mean that it is routinely practiced by all. Greenleaf's book was called Servant Leadership; the leader as servant.

I personally think that servant leadership is redundant. I think all true leadership is of greater service to others.

We just have done a twelve minute book review, but those really lacking the specific tactics are the six skill sets that all effective leaders use whether or not they have a title to get results with people.

**Marty:** To sum up the six skills you talked about, we had self mastery, focus, power with people, persuasive communication, execution, and service or giving. That is a great platform from which to start and to become obviously a superior leader.

How can we take those skills and use them within our organizations to help motivate people to be productive and to do the things that need to be done if we are in a leadership role?

**Mark:** I am a pragmatist. I have a college degree and I study a great deal, but whenever I write or speak, I always think about practical application. Theory doesn't do any good if it doesn't improve one's ability to act.

I like to be real practical, and I think it's really about three things. I am over simplifying a bit in limited time.

I think it begins by having a clear expectation of what needs to be done. Having worked in corporate America for some 30 years, I can tell you that one of the basic dilemmas that a lot of organizations still face is people not being clear about what it is they are supposed to be



doing.

They have a job description, they have a general sense, but they are not clear on what is expected of them. I think the reason for that is unfortunately some managers and leaders are not really clear on what they actually expect the work of the individual, the department, or organization to be.

You have got to begin by clarifying expectations. I find more often than not if I don't get what I want or need from another person, it isn't because they are maliciously withholding it from me, but it is because I was unclear about what I wanted or needed.

I think leaders, I go back to that idea of responsibility. If you are not getting what you want or need from another person, make sure they know what it is that you want and need.

After you have established that expectation, then I think the next step is agreement. There are some times we will get push back from people, and disagreement isn't always bad. Sometimes in disagreement lays the seed of a better solution.

I suggest to my team members that this is what needs to be done and how to do it. They say, "Well, if we do that, here is an unintended consequence," or "here is a better way we can do that," or "here is a more cost effective way we can do that."

After we have discussed the options, the real key here is to create agreement. Now I know you know what needs to be done, and you have agreed to do it.

Sometimes we just think that because someone didn't explicitly say they wouldn't that they will, and if you've got kids, that is not always true. That is kind of a sneaky tactic. "Well, I didn't say I wouldn't, but I didn't say I would either."

Years ago I knew one of the two founders of Career Track, a great guy named Jeff Salsman. Jeff said something, and it was a very simple tactic, but I found it very useful over time.

He said, "When you are in a negotiation or a discussion, if it is really important and you are really clear not only on expectation and agreement, say to somebody, 'Do I have your word on that?'"

Do I have your word on that? What Jeff found and what I have found,



too, is that people are very reticent about giving their word unless they are very committed. That is when you are going to find out if there is any push back.

When somebody says, “You’ve got my word on that,” more often than not you are good. It is when somebody says, “Oh, now wait a minute. I said I would try. I will do what I can.”

It really is the ultimate sign of commitment when someone is willing to give you their word.

The third part of this is probably relevant more often than not in the workplace and that is are people clear on the consequences of what will happen if they do or don’t give what they have promised?

What a performance review is in effect is it is an examination of agreements and the application of consequences. A good performance review shouldn’t be about “Here is all the stuff you were supposed to be doing that you didn’t know you should be doing.”

It should always be based on “You’ve been clear about what you should be doing. Here is what you actually did. It either met, surpassed, or fell short of those expectations. Now let’s talk about the consequences.”

If, by the way, those expectations have been exceeded, the consequences of a good performance review are most likely an increase in responsibility, position, title, pay, benefits. There are any number of things.

But one of the problems that we run into in organizations is very often we haven’t really thought through what the negative consequences would be.

Negative consequences are often, “You didn’t do what you said you would do. We are going to just let you try it again.” The bottom line is if you have no negative consequences for not changing your behavior, you are not going to change your behavior.

If I say to either of my two sons, “Don’t eat the ice cream before dinner,” and there are no consequences, they are going to eat the ice cream. If then we have dinner and I let it slide, the next time I say, “Don’t eat the ice cream before dinner,” they are going to eat the ice cream.

If I say, “Don’t eat the ice cream before dinner,” and they eat the ice



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cream before dinner and the consequences are they go to bed two hours early, they're probably going to think twice before they eat the ice cream before dinner again.

That might be a simple illustration, but it is exactly the same kind of mechanism, it is the same kind of process that plays itself out in organizations every day.

We say to employees, "We really need you to change. We want you to change. We beg you to change. Please change!" They don't change, and nothing is different. There are no consequences.

The primary reason why people change is hope of gain or fear of loss. Again, I know your really savvy listeners are saying, "Wait a minute. I thought you said that you shouldn't lead out of compliance."

Compliance is still a subset of commitment. When I commit to something, it is because I see a positive consequence. It might not be the lack of punishment. Maybe the positive consequence is I don't want to disappoint you. Maybe the positive consequence is I want to be a good team player. Maybe the positive consequence is I want to be given more responsibility in the future.

When I say to think in terms of consequences, I am not suggesting that punitive consequences are necessarily the best route to go, but they are part of a smorgasbord of options that we have.

If people are clear on the expectation, and they have agreed to delivery, that they understand what the consequences are, then they either enjoy those consequences or they don't get to enjoy the consequences, and there are negative consequences for that disappointment.

**Marty:** Okay. Can you give some examples of case studies from your experience where people maybe didn't have this information and how they received this and transformed their organizations using some of these steps?

**Mark:** We do have a few case studies in our work. Most of what I do is anecdotal, and this would be a situation where I can give you one example. I worked with a manufacturing company many years ago that actually had a line operator who had a defective rate that was something like 90%, which is to say that for every ten parts that were manufactured, one part met spec and the other nine didn't.

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**Marty:** Pretty bad.

**Mark:** To say the least! When they approached her, she basically said two things. Number one, nobody gave her that feedback before. She didn't know what her defective rate was. That is the old management/ leadership cliché: measure what you treasure, and don't keep it to yourself.

If defective rate is an important measurement, it is far better to have the person on the line have that information than the person at the end of the line. She did not have that information.

Number two, this was the thing, and this goes back and speaks directly to what we were just talking about. Her pay was no different when he defect rate was lower than it was when it was higher.

In other words, there was no linkage. She was honest about it. She said, "I don't know what difference it makes. I get paid the same amount."

My old friend Michael Leboeuf wrote a book many years ago called The Greatest Management Principle in the World. It is a fun little book and it is a quick read. I often recommend it.

He begins the book by telling an amusing story, and I will just get to the moral of the story. The moral of the story is that you don't get the behavior you ask for, beg for, and plead for. You get the behavior you reward. What is rewarded is what is done.

That is really the premise that Michael wrote this book about. He talked about ten different ways to reward different behavior, and ten different types of behavior that you want to reward.

The reason I bring that up is because if the reward is the same for poor work as it is for excellent work, then what incentive do I have with the exception of my own self-esteem, which I don't want to underestimate?

What incentive does a person really have to put in the extra effort to do excellent when mediocre or poor performance is rewarded the same?

**Marty:** In the process you had mentioned before, this example obviously clarified expectations. She had no idea what the expectation was for a defect rate.

**Mark:** This actually goes back to the first thing about expectations. I think it

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was an assumption by her supervisor that she must know that quality parts are the objective. That would be, by the way, I wouldn't argue that this is a valid assumption, but in this case it was an erroneous assumption.

Lacking that and lacking any measurement tool or any consequences, at some level as pathetic as that story is, it is very easy to understand how that happened.

**Marty:** Oh, absolutely. They clarified the expectations, then they created an agreement probably of some sort like, "Look, what we really need is X," and got the agreement.

Then the third step you mentioned was being clear on the consequences. It sounds like by bringing up the fact that she gets paid the same no matter what, I would imagine that probably changed very quickly as well. Maybe some bonus for increased quality.

**Mark:** Or maybe being docked in pay for decrease. By the way, I think, Marty, you kind of raised an interesting point. If we were going to interject something between agreement and consequences, and I think it makes sense in retrospect, and I didn't talk about this, but we certainly should consider it.

In between agreement and consequences there should be feedback. Feedback answers the question, "How am I doing?" The best time to get feedback isn't at the performance review. It is in the year preceding the performance review.

If you give feedback only at the performance review, it is like trying to make birth control retroactive. It is a great idea, but it is very impractical.

This woman not only, to extend the metaphor, was unclear about expectations and consequences, but also she had no feedback up until that point. It is kind of like she got a final exam when she didn't know what the course was that she was taking.

The final exam was "We want 100% quality; you are turning in 10% quality. Now you are in trouble." She didn't get any feedback. She didn't know that was the objective. She didn't have any tools to adjust her performance.

Feedback is information you can use to improve your performance. Any time you give somebody information that they can't use to adjust their



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behavior, it isn't feedback. It is criticism.

"I don't like you. You've got a bad attitude," by the way, is criticism. The reason "You've got a bad attitude" is criticism is because it gives me no information that I can use to improve it.

If I have a bad attitude and that is judged by the unfriendly manner in which I interact with my peers, then the feedback is "You need to learn to be more diplomatic and friendly with your coworkers."

I think sometimes that we think that just giving people information is feedback. Information that doesn't inform, inflames.

This sounds silly, but when I stand in front of an audience, chances are there are going to be people in the audience that take one look at me and don't like me. I look their ex-brother-in-law, I look like their ex-husband, I look the kid that beat them up on the playground, or I look like the kid that they beat up on the playground.

The point is, it has got nothing to do with me and frankly nothing to do with them. I look like a guy that they don't like. If they come up and say, "I didn't like you," that may be true, but it isn't instructive. It is probably a way to create a little conflict.

If somebody comes up and says, "I really had to check myself because I immediately took a dislike to you because you just look so stiff. When you loosened up, I liked you better." Now, I can use that.

I think as leaders, as communicators, as parents, as spouses we need to think if what we are saying is truly feedback or is it criticism? Is it instructive, does it inform people, or does it simply inflame them?

**Marty:** Good point! Just looking over your six keys of leadership, there is one word in there that people most often associate with leadership, but I don't see you addressing that in your six keys.

I would love to hear what your thoughts are on the word respect. Where does respect fit into leadership, and how can I establish that?

**Mark:** I think respect is a by-product. I think respect is a by-product of credibility. I talk about three components to credibility and leadership because that is a question that I think over the years I have been asked a lot.

What gives me credibility, and certainly your listeners who have

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listened this far certainly know it is not your title. Credibility comes from three things. The first is your competence: being good at what you do. You are not credible if you are a train wreck. If you can't do your job, people will at the very least not respect you and at worst mock you.

The key is we don't have to be better than everyone else who does our job, but we darn well have to be as good as everyone else. Competency is key because without competency, don't expect credibility.

The second "C", if competency is about what you do, character is about who you are. Character says who you appear to be. Trustworthiness comes from knowing that I believe what you say to me because I have never caught you saying things that weren't true to others.

For years in leadership circles we had this crazy conversation, and in retrospect it was just butt-stupid, about was character really necessary to be a good leader? Couldn't you just be effective at what you do, get results, influence people, and maybe be a snake in the grass?

**Marty:** That is a debate that is raging right now in the current presidential election climate.

**Mark:** You would have thought we would have learned from a few former presidents that it is the wrong question. It is like could you run a race with a sprained ankle? Technically, yeah. It wouldn't be a very fast race, and it would hurt like a son of a gun, but you could do it.

Here is a better question: How much more effective is leadership when it is leveraged by character? The point is, here is what Enron taught us. Enron taught us that character is the safety net for ambition and ability.

If you have a leader who is really effective at influencing people but is not trustworthy, you've got a potential legal case. You've got a potential breach of trust, confidence, and any number of problems.

If someone follows you voluntarily - and this is kind of a bottom line, Marty - if somebody follows you voluntarily, they do because they trust you.

If they have to follow you and they don't trust you, that is compliance, and again we move back in the other direction. Character is key. Competence is what you do; character is who you are.

You could have both those things, be a great human being, and still not



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be a leader. The third “C” is connection. People rarely change outside of a relationship. That means that people follow you because they believe you have their best interests at heart.

By the way, and you mentioned the presidential elections. A guy named Joel Klein wrote a book called Politics Lost. I had been talking about these three C’s – the competence, character, and connection – for a number of years.

I ran across this book, and in the book Klein says that whenever we elect someone, whenever we look at a political leader, the first question is are they strong? I think that is another way of saying are they competent? Competency is about the ability to produce results, right? If you are strong, you can produce results. If you are weak, you are ineffectual.

The second question that Klein poses is “Can I trust them?” That is the character question. The third question I loved because truth is transferable. You can use different words, but the principle never changes; only the context.

The third question Klein asks, he says when we go to vote for someone, we want to know if they care about people like me. That is a connection question.

The problem I have got with any politician, democrat, republican, libertarian, or undecided, is that we more often than not today base our decisions on appeal or style versus substance or ability.

We tend to vote for the sound byte and not for the substance of the candidate. It would be a lot of fun, but I won’t go there and unintentionally alienate people by talking about the current presidential race.

Go back to Ross Perot, if your listeners are old enough to remember Ross Perot.

**Marty:** I am all ears, Mark!

**Mark:** Good! Someone my age! I actually knew who all four of the Beatles were.

If you go back and you look at James Stockdale and Dennis Miller, whose commentary I like, he said that Stockdale committed the cardinal sin in American politics: he didn’t look good on TV. The guy

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was a paragon of character and ability, he was a hero, and he had everything that we should have admired, but unfortunately, he looked bad in front of the camera.

This is a double-edged danger. There are two edges to the sword. The first edge of the sword is for us as followers and who we decide to follow.

The second edge of the sword is for us as leaders in that – and this is all tying together in a kind of weird way. Remember I said what gets rewarded gets done? If an organization rewards you for style, appearance, and an ability to schmooze but not substantive issues, you will play the game that way.

If a political system is dominated by the sound bite and who is the best speaker, and who is the most virile looking candidate, etcetera, I don't care. The parties and the names are interchangeable. Politics will start cow-towing to style over substance and appeal over ability.

That is the double-edged sword. We as leaders can get sucked into that. I have met them, and by the way every day as a leader I live in fear of them. Am I coming across as who I am not because I am getting caught up in the allure of appearance and not dealing with the substantive issues?

It is easy, lest anybody out there throw a stone. We all live in glass houses. It is easy to get sucked into that.

**Marty:** Let's leave politics.

**Mark:** Thankfully! The older you get, the more important aggressions are than what you were talking about to begin with.

**Marty:** Let's quickly review some of the skills and the keys to leadership you were talking about: self mastery, focus, power with people, persuasive communication, execution, and service.

We talked about the three Cs: competence, character, and connection. We talked about a process of leadership: clarifying expectations, creating agreement, and being clear on consequence . You like Cs, don't you, Mark?

**Mark:** I like alliteration. It is just one of those idiosyncrasies.

**Marty:** If I asked you to boil down the number one most important trait in a

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leader, what would you say that is?

**Mark:** That is a great question. What makes the question difficult is that it is a lot to me like asking, “What is the most important organ in the body?”

I don’t care what organ you name, without the rest of the organs, it is in trouble. Maybe to use that analogy, if you asked me what the heart of leadership is, it is responsibility.

It is funny because I used to say self responsibility, but I think self responsibility misses a bigger point. Responsibility is about first taking responsibility for your own life. I spoke a little bit about that, and I don’t want to belabor that.

So many people today are choosing to be victims of circumstance. I have a friend who works with kids, and he works with tough kids, kids that have had problems that you and I hopefully have never had or didn’t have as children or will never inflict on other people. I mean just terrible stuff!

My friend, John, said something years ago. He said, “Kids are the only real victims because they don’t have the skills set.” That is what makes crimes against children so heinous. They are defenseless, they don’t have skill sets, and they don’t have communication skills to protect themselves.

Where I am going with this is John said, “Kids are the only real victims. Adults are volunteers.” Now that doesn’t mean that bad things don’t happen to good people. It means that at some point you reach a point where you have developed the skill set so that when unfair, bad, unplanned for, serendipitous things happen, you go, “Tough break!”

Bad stuff happens to people. I lost my father to cancer when he was 63. I can tell you from a cosmic perspective, my father, or for that matter anyone I have ever known who has cancer didn’t deserve it.

Anybody who has ever had to deal with a significant life event whether it was cancer, loss of a job, loss of a loved one, or career challenge, the only way they were able to progress was when they stopped getting mired up in the lie of “Why me?” and they started to focus on the “What do I do?”

There are people, and I meet them every day, who honestly believe that someday that person, that employer, that spouse, that significant other, that friend, that coach, that fill-in-the-blank is going to do it for



them. That person is going to give them the missing key. They are going to grab a hold of this dorsal fin of this super dolphin and the rest of their life is going to be a great success.

It doesn't work that way. There are people who will help you. There are people who will support you, encourage you, reward you, praise you, but there is no one who can do it for you except you.

That is so simple that I think it is overlooked. Responsibility is the first aspect, but here is the second aspect. We are responsible to other people. I have some libertarian friends, and I love libertarians. They have a little bit different outlook on this. My actions impinge on others.

For instance, I have a pet peeve. I am a motorcyclist. My pet peeves would apply to me when I am driving a car. They make me nuts when I am on a motorcycle. If you hit me in my car, you bend up my car. If you hit me on my motorcycle, you bend up my body.

I have a pet peeve with people who are talking on a cell phone and not paying attention, and people who run red lights. You say, "Wait a minute! It is America! I can talk on my cell phone." You know what, who of us has not run a red light that kind of just turned red, but we were heading that way already?

What that says is your life and your safety is less important than me making my damn meeting on time. Me hitting you and T-boning your vehicle with your kids in it is less important than me getting to my golf game.

What is interesting is that I honestly know that people don't think about it that way, but they ought to. Where I am going with this is I am trying to start at a very basic level to say that the navel is not the center of the universe.

Until we realize that what we do isn't just about us, we are never going to make it any further as a culture, we are not going to make it as an organization, we are not going to make it as communities, and we are not even going to make it as families.

I know that we have all spent, I think, some part of our lives self-absorbed for any number of reasons, but I tell you what. You get to be a certain age, and the smallest package in the world, like the old cliché says, is somebody who is wrapped up in him or herself.

I think that one of the things that drive leaders deep down is that



leaders get it. Leaders go, “You know what? I don’t have to run for the school board, but somebody needs to bring some fresh thinking to how we educate our kids.”

Someone might say, “You know what? Let somebody else teach Sunday school or help out at synagogue.” The real leader says, “You know what? I can do that. I can make a difference.” Ambition says, “I am responsible for personal gain,” while leadership says, “I am responsible for gain bigger than myself.”

I used to say self responsibility, my opinion, was the heart of leadership. I now say that it is just responsibility because it suggests that we are responsible both to ourselves and to others.

**Marty:** My experience is that a lot of people are either responsible or not responsible. Do you believe that this is something that you are born with, or is this something that can be learned?

**Mark:** Both. That is another great debate. The current medical data is that 50 to 60% of our personalities are genetically pre-determined, and about 40 to 50% are by nurture, our environment.

It doesn’t really matter much because that still means we’ve got about 50% within our control. For instance, if you are only born five feet tall, that is going to affect your ability to play NBA basketball, although there have been a few five-footers out there.

However, you may not play for the NBA, but I know a lot of great ball players who are short. The answer is yes, for some people it is easier to tell the truth than for others. But I think this whole nature-nurture thing becomes an excuse for giving people a free pass. Well, you know, they are just genetically mean. You know what? There are days when I would like to be mean. I am hopefully mature enough not to be.

It is something that we learn, and it is something that we have got to teach our kids. Without going too far a field, I think as leaders, one of the things we need to remember is that parents sometimes, in a time-compressed society, give permissiveness and possessions instead of time and teaching.

That is to say that because we don’t have the time to teach our kids and to spend with them, we try to compensate by being permissive and/or giving them possessions instead of.

I could make a case, and I know we don’t have three hours, but I could



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make a case for not only is it learned, but it is the responsibility of the culture, teachers, parents and others to teach responsibility.

**Marty:** If responsibility can be learned, and it sounds as though you believe it can be to some degree, in all of your travels and years of experience, do you have an example of maybe someone who wasn't the most responsible person in the world but turned that around and became more responsible and thus became a leader?

**Mark:** It would be easy to say that I have overcome a lot of weaknesses, flaws, idiosyncrasies, and unusual predispositions. We are all works in progress. That would be a little bit of a cop out.

I thought what you were going to go towards is how do you do that?

**Marty:** I do have that question. [Laughter]

**Mark:** I know a young man right now who is serving in Iraq. He was the epitome of irresponsible. I can tell you the story, but I can't tell you the reason behind the story.

He was a fairly misguided youth. He decided to enlist in the military. He found his discipline, his responsibility, and just an incredibly high level of commitment to service through the military.

The thing I don't know, Marty, was what the epiphany was. Was there a person; was there an event? Was it internal; was it an external circumstance? I don't know. I will tell you this. If you and I or any of your listeners want to be more responsible, I am a professional reminder.

People who tend to listen to things like this, are well-read, and they listen to a lot of speakers. It was Samuel Johnson who once said, "Most people don't need to be taught. They need only to be reminded."

I want to remind people of a couple things. Number one, here is the secret to responsibility: keep commitments, period. Do you want to learn a little responsibility? You don't just keep commitments when it is convenient. You keep them when it is inconvenient.

Every once in a while, you will find as I have that you will make a commitment that was stupid, but you keep it because it was a commitment. That is more about you than it is about the other person.

I believe that the ultimate service strategy, and maybe the ultimate



business strategy, is say what you'll do, and do what you say. It seems that increasingly that is rare that we do business with people who can be counted on to actually follow up and follow through.

It is about keeping your word. Now the other side of that coin is don't make commitments you can't keep. I am not suggesting we go through life just blindly promising and become sadomasochistic. Here is the other thing. I don't remember who said it, but I love the quote. A famous entertainer said, "I wake up every morning with two objectives: one is to change the world, and the other is to have a hell of a good time, and frankly, that makes planning the day very difficult."

The reason I like that is many years ago I used to say to audiences, "Every day, do something really hard, and every day, do something just for the pure fun of it."

We have to balance responsibility with flexibility. We have to balance hard work with enjoyment. I think it is important to mention that B.C. Forbes who started *Forbes* Magazine, the great capitalist said, "Let's never forget that the business of living is not business. It is living."

I think the way we develop responsibility is we pick something hard to do. There has been a significant amount of study in the area of expertise and skill development. Just like we know that the only way to grow a muscle, the only way to grow a skill is by trying something harder than what you currently can do.

If you can lift ten pounds, you are never going to get stronger by continuing to lift ten pounds. You are just going to maintain your ability to lift ten pounds. You are going to get stronger by making the muscle work harder. Over time, the muscle acclimates to the increased workload.

It is the same with learning. If you only do what you are capable of doing, you are never going to grow. You need to find something, and you need to challenge yourself.

Every once in a while I have taken on an engagement or a client that I know in advance ain't going to be easy. I don't do it to be sadomasochistic but because I know it is going to stretch me.

Do something hard. Find something you do every day that is challenging, and then do one thing a day just for the pure fun of it. I will tell you where this came from, and this is going to totally un-impress your listeners. Again, you've got to be an older person to remember



“Smokey and the Bandit.”

It may be the only serious scene in the movie, and that is even debatable. If you remember, I think Sally Field is Smokey’s pseudo girlfriend. She asks him as he is leaning up against the side of the Trans Am back when they built real cars in America. She says, “Smokey, why do you live this way?” Do you remember the speech? Do you remember what Burt Reynolds says?

**Marty:** No, it’s been long enough that I can’t remember.

**Mark:** Marty, if you remembered that one, I was going to give you a gold star.

Smokey is standing there with his arms folded, chewing on a toothpick, and he says, “My daddy worked all his life, ten hours a day in a coal mine. He was going to retire when he was 65, and he was going to spend the rest of his life fishing. My daddy died why he was 64.”

Not high drama exactly, but a pretty good philosophy. If you keep waiting until tomorrow to do something fun, you get hit by an RTD bus tonight, and you are going to regret that you didn’t do it today.

You have to balance discipline against enjoyment. That’s why I say if you want to develop responsibility and enjoy the journey both, every day do something hard, and every day do something just for the pure fun of it.

**Marty:** That is some great advice. From a take away standpoint, one of the things The Business Source listeners have asked us for is some applications that they can use immediately.

Those listeners who are listening to us today who are making the commitment, “I want to be a better leader,” what kind of things should they begin to do first thing tomorrow morning to begin that process of becoming a better leader?

**Mark:** Let me make a number of suggestions. Think of this as a buffet: pick and choose. Number one, I would encourage anyone who is serious about leadership to spend 15 to 30 minutes at some point in the day. My preference is first thing in the morning, reading, studying, and thinking.

I think we go days and weeks without thinking. I don’t mean thinking to use our turn signal, or what color pens to order from the supply store. I mean where you sit down and you think about your life.

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I spend 15 minutes a day, and you are thinking, “Wow, you are not aiming very high.” Trust me. Try going somewhere with a notepad, no laptop computer, no Wi-Fi, no cell phone, and try thinking for 15 minutes.

Within 30 seconds, you are going to think about a phone call you needed to make, an e-mail you needed to send, or a meeting you needed to convene. Think and study and reflect for 15 to 30 minutes a day.

This is based on anecdotal feedback from my colleagues and clients. This is the single most powerful thing you can do to improve not only your skill set as a leader but the quality of your life.

I sometimes say spend 15 minutes day thinking and spend 15 to 20 to 30 minutes a day studying. I am going to roll it up into one. Spend 15 to 30 minutes a day studying, thinking, and reflecting.

Number two: at the end of every business day ask yourself, “What did I learn today?” A lot of people go weeks without ever learning anything.

By the way, if you can’t isolate what you have learned, you ain’t learned it. In other words, you can have all sorts of experiences during the course of the day, and if you haven’t taken the time to distill the lesson, it is lost to you.

If you think every day, “What did I learn today?” if you could come up with one idea a day, assuming you worked 50 weeks a year, take two weeks off for vacation, 40 hours a week to make the math easy, if you could do that 50 weeks a year times 5 days a week, you come up with 250 lessons a year. You could write a book about it.

The problem isn’t that we don’t have experiences we can learn from. The problem is that we have experiences that we don’t extract a lesson from.

My second suggestion would be at the end of every day, whether that is at the end of the work day, or at the end of the day before you turn in at night, ask yourself, “What have I learned?”

Third idea. Take a leader to lunch. Find somebody you respect. Always pay for free advice. I have actually had people say, “Hey, I want to take you to lunch and pick your brain,” and then when the check came they actually made me pay for my meal. [Laughter]



It's not that I can't afford to pay for my meal. I could eat a free lunch every day of every week if I wanted to. I know right there and then that this person probably is not ever going to get better.

Always pay for free advice. I will give you my money before I give you my time. Wouldn't that mean I want your listeners calling me for money? The point is that the only thing I have less of than disposable income is disposable time.

If you are going to take me to lunch and pick my brain, make a compelling case for why you want to do that. Make sure that you reimburse me at a psychic level. I am not saying you will pay me money, but at least buy my lunch.

When people call me, I appreciate most the people who say, "I know your time is valuable. I want to take you to lunch. I want to buy you lunch. Just give me an hour of your time. One of the things I want to find out before we finish lunch is how I might help you."

You know what? Sometimes they can't help me. There might not be a need, but the fact that they are willing to reciprocate, I know they are a player.

It doesn't mean that they are rich, famous, or otherwise, but I know they get it. Take a leader to lunch, somebody you really respect, and buy their lunch. If you really want to impress them favorably, find out how you can help them. Sometimes you can help by helping them brainstorm, just giving your perspective.

The fourth thing I would suggest, and you want to put this to work right away, is you want to pick a silent mentor, meaning one that doesn't talk.

Rick Warren said all of your mentors should be dead. By that he means that when you study the life of Abraham Lincoln, we pretty much have figured out Lincoln's life ended. We know the good, the bad, and the ugly. If you pick a living mentor, he says the problem is they might flame out before they get to the end of the game.

He says that partly facetiously, but what I think is we all think of mentors as people we interact with. I have a lot of mentors. I love philosophy. I love Aristotle. That doesn't mean I am as knowledgeable as I would like to be.

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I love C.S. Lewis. I love G.K. Chesterton. The reason they are silent mentors is I will never obviously speak with them, at least not in this life, but I can learn from them.

Pick a leader from history, recent or distant history. Say, "I am going to be the man or woman who knows everything there is to know about Napoleon, about Churchill, about Abraham Lincoln, about John F. Kennedy.

Pick a silent mentor, and using your imagination you can think, "What would this person say to me?" Obviously it takes some imagination, but "What is this person saying to me by what I have read about their lives, their letters, their experiences, the things that they did?"

Finally, let me just give you a quick list of three, really six, questions if you want to lead, if you want to lead more effectively tomorrow. You get up in the morning, you look around the house or you look around the office and you ask, "What needs to be fixed?"

People say, "Where do I start to lead? They won't make me the head of the X committee." Why don't you just find something that needs to be fixed and fix it?

Then people are going to say, "Wow! I noticed that the water cooler works. Who fixed that?" "Bob came in this morning and he fixed it." Here is the other question you've got to ask. Am I passionate about fixing it?

By the way, a lot of stuff I do everyday I am not passionate about. If it is going to take a lot of hours or a lot of time, you had better be passionate about it or you are not going to make it to the finish line.

Big projects require passion or you are going to end up making commitments you dread because you did it for the wrong reasons.

Number one: what needs to be fixed? Are you passionate about fixing it? Number two, who needs your attention? Are you passionate about giving it to them?

There are people around us every day that a little encouragement, a friendly word of advice, or maybe just a listening ear would make the difference.

Maybe that's why the young man is in Iraq right now. Maybe that was the turning point for him. Maybe it was a recruiter who finally gave him

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the attention he needed to help him get his life on track.

So number two, who needs your attention? Are you passionate about giving it? Are you up to giving it?

Number three, what needs to be improved? You fix things that are broken, but you improve things that can be better. Are you passionate about improving those things?

It doesn't matter if you've got a title, Big L or Little L leader, all of those areas are areas that any of us can use. By the way, they are techniques I use. They are not just techniques I suggest. I try to keep my knife sharp and to stay at the top of my game.

**Marty:** That was all six, right?

**Mark:** Yes, for the three questions, the follow up questions, "Am I passionate about doing it, giving attention, or improving it?" round out the six.

**Marty:** Got it. It is funny, as I look over what needs to be fixed, who needs my attention, and what needs to be improved, I think I had better thank you for the fact that I am stuck volunteering at Cub Scout camp all of next week. [Laughter]

**Mark:** You know what though? I was a chaperone on my son's field trip. Despite all of my work in leadership and positive thinking, I can honestly say I had fairly low expectations but ended up having an absolute blast.

**Marty:** That is good. I know I am going to have a good time as well, the four days in the heat with a bunch of nine and ten year olds. That is exactly how I got into this. I said, "What needs to be fixed here?" and "Who needs my attention?" and "What needs to be improved?" Now I am a camp leader.

**Mark:** Good for you! There is an act of service at its finest.

**Marty:** Those are great questions. That is a wonderful, wonderful synopsis to wake up in the morning and ask yourself those six questions. When you go to bed that night, I think your day will be totally different than a normal day. I think that is sending some really great advice with some gold nuggets in there.

**Mark:** I do blog a fair amount at [www.MarkSanborn.com](http://www.MarkSanborn.com), if you want to access my blog. The other thing is we have a free ezine that I write

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every other month. It is called “Leadership Lessons.” If people find value and want more ideas like these that we have discussed today, it is an opt-in automated system. They can sign up again at [www.MarkSanborn.com](http://www.MarkSanborn.com).

**Marty:** Great! Thanks for those resources. They will be very helpful to our listeners.

Any final words that you would like to share with our listeners today on the topic of leadership?

**Mark:** Let me just close with my definition of integrity. I think integrity is so critical. I think integrity is honored above all. I think that ability without integrity is suspect. Ability with integrity is trustworthy.

Integrity is the distance between your lips and your life. When we are congruent between the things that we say and the things that we do, then we are living integrated and whole lives. I think that is a worthwhile goal of leaders anywhere and of any ilk.

I hope that your listeners today have found some ideas that will help them to do an even better job of leading.

**Marty:** Great advice! Thank you very much for taking the time to share your knowledge and expertise with our audience today, Mark. I really appreciate it!

**Mark:** My pleasure.

**Marty:** Ladies and gentlemen, you have been listening to Mark Sanborn talk about the topic of leadership. As he mentioned, if you would like to get more information or reach him, you can reach him at [www.MarkSanborn.com](http://www.MarkSanborn.com).

I would like to thank you for joining us today and listening to this audio recording. We hope it has been valuable to you.

On behalf of The Business Source, my name is Marty M. Fahncke. Thank you for joining us, and please have a great day.

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