

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***LEADERSHIP GOLD: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A LIFETIME OF LEADING*** BY JOHN C. MAXWELL

*Reviewed by Breck A. Harris*  
Fresno Pacific University

Many experienced leaders can remember an important time in their career when they had the opportunity to be mentored by others. I certainly did. Early in my college teaching career, I had the wonderful opportunity to learn about effective classroom leadership while being mentored by more experienced Christian business teachers that I worked with at Fresno Pacific University. This was a priceless educational experience for me. Being mentored can help us become more effective leaders. John C. Maxwell's insights on leadership discussed in his 2008 book titled *Leadership Gold: Lessons Learned from a Lifetime of Leading* offer constructive mentoring ideas for all types of leaders.

In this book, Maxwell discusses both leadership successes and failures during his long and illustrious leadership career. He began to write this book after he turned 60. Maxwell divides the book into 26 chapters. He describes each chapter as a "gold nugget" that can add value for any leader. (P. vii)

The end of each chapter includes application exercises for both the aspiring leader and additional mentoring advice for the more experienced leader. For the new leader, Maxwell recommends taking one week to read every chapter. For the more experienced leader, the author recommends taking two weeks to read each chapter; one week to allow the lesson in each chapter to be absorbed and an additional week to implement the additional mentoring exercises with followers.

One insight discussed is that if you are lonely

as a leader, you are not leading effectively. "If you're all alone, that means nobody is following you. And if nobody is following you, you're not really leading!" (p.3). Maxwell encourages taking other people with you as you get promoted. Another requirement for effective leadership is having great passion for what you do. Maxwell offers the advice of Confucius, who stated, "Choose work you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" (p. 46).

The best leaders are listeners—not talkers. Among reasons given by the author for why listening is so important to leadership are that understanding people precedes leading them, listening is the best way to learn, listening can keep problems from escalating and that listening establishes trust with followers (pp. 51-53).

Another "nugget" is that if you want to determine if a leader is truly successful and effective, simply look at the followers. Related to this concept, Maxwell provides revealing questions for leaders to ask about followers: Are the people following? Are the people changing? Are the people growing? Are the people succeeding? (pp. 77-80) These questions reinforce a central underlying theme repeated often in different chapters: Great leaders are unselfish in helping develop the potential of their followers.

In chapter 10, "Don't Send Your Ducks to Eagle School," Maxwell claims it is the leader's responsibility to insure followers are working according to their strengths. If not, leaders have a responsibility to reposition them. Maxwell states

“Leadership is all about placing people in the right place so they can be successful” (p.88).

Great leaders are also connectors; they connect in caring ways with people and focus on building relationships that value cooperation and partnership. Connectors build consensus and want to stand with others. Maxwell claims that

*Getting to the top without connecting with our people at best allows us to lead people without their allegiance. At worst, it undermines our leadership and makes it short-lived. People you climb over will look for an opportunity to pull you down (p. 175).*

In the final chapter, “People Will Summarize Your Life in One Sentence — Pick It Now,” Maxwell asks leaders to ponder the question, “What will my legacy be?” Leaders need to

reflect on what they can leave behind to the next generation. Maxwell encourages leaders to choose their legacy and live today the legacy you want to leave (pp. 245-247).

*Leadership Gold* presents insightful leadership knowledge by an internationally recognized expert. The leadership “nuggets” contained in this book is written in an easy-to-read style. The audience for this book includes all types of leaders, both aspiring and experienced, who want to benefit from improving their leadership style. This book offers significant ideas to improve leadership in all organizations. I highly recommend it as supplemental reading in any business leadership class. It will provide a wonderful road map to help any aspiring leader navigate the often difficult challenge of leading others.