

N E X T G E N E R A T I O N L E A D E R

F I V E E S S E N T I A L S F O R T H O S E
W H O W I L L S H A P E T H E F U T U R E



A N D Y S T A N L E Y

N E X T
GENERATION
LEADER

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W H O W I L L S H A P E T H E F U T U R E

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For my children,
ANDREW, GARRETT, AND ALLIE.

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INTRODUCTION

The more you know about leadership, the faster you grow as a leader and the farther you are able to go as a leader. Learning from the experiences of others enables you to go farther, faster. It is that simple truth that inspired me to write *Next Generation Leader*.

As the pastor of a church with a median age of thirty, I find myself surrounded by next generation leaders—men and women who have the potential to shape their generation. They are eager to learn. They are committed to personal growth. And given the chance, they will attempt things that my generation only dreamed about.

The success of North Point Community Church has provided me a window of opportunity. For the time being, a segment of this remarkable group of men and women is interested in what I have to say about leadership. So I consider it my responsibility to hand off what I have learned while I have the chance.

If much will be required from those to whom much has been given, then much will be required of me. For I have been given much in the way of example, opportunity, and training.

I grew up in the shadow of my father, Charles Stanley, a gifted communicator and accomplished leader. Yet in spite of his professional responsibilities he never missed a basketball game or failed to carve out time for extensive summer vacations. I was nurtured by a mom who saw it as her mission to prepare me to leave the nest with the security and skills necessary to thrive in this unpredictable world.

By the time I was fourteen my parents had pretty much quit making decisions for me and thereby forced me to decide for myself and live with the consequences of my decisions. I never had a curfew. My dad asked me when I planned to be home, and that's when I headed home. To my knowledge, they never waited up.

I was given lots of freedom. I was also given the full measure of responsibility that went along with that freedom. When I got my first speeding ticket—a whopping two weeks after I'd received my license—my dad's only comment was, "Better slow down." No lectures. No suspended driving privileges. He figured the fine was punishment enough.

I was no angel. In many respects I was a typical preacher's kid. But my wise parents gave me very little to rebel against. Instead they loaded me up with what, looking back, appears to be an almost naïve amount of trust.

In hindsight, I can see that my parents raised me to lead. In terms of actual practice and principles, more was caught than taught. I don't remember a single conversation that centered on the subject of leadership. But through the vision they cast and the opportunities they provided, I was given an incredible head start as a leader.

For that reason, I am convinced that it is my responsibility to pass on what I know about leadership to the generation coming along behind me. So it has been the habit of my life to carve out time for the next generation, the capable men and women who will eventually catch, pass, and replace me.

When I was in college, that next generation was high school students. When I was in graduate school, it was undergrads. When I landed my first real job, I invested in young men headed into ministry. In addition, I spent ten

years meeting with small groups of high school seniors, pouring into their cups all I could from my own.

This has been my lifestyle. For many of those who were part of my groups, it has become their lifestyle as well. A handful are now in full-time ministry. One serves as the worship leader at our church. Another is now my stockbroker. Some fly airplanes; some have their own companies; most are married, with children. A few have dropped off the map.

I approach this task of handing off what I have learned with the full knowledge that in the days to come the next generation's gifts to this world will certainly eclipse whatever I have had to offer. But, then, that's the point. In leadership, *success* is *succession*. If someone coming along behind me is not able to take what I have offered and build on it, then I have failed in my responsibility to the next generation.

I began this project with a series of questions:

1. What are the leadership principles I wish someone had shared with me when I was a young leader?
2. What do I know now that I wish I had known then?
3. Of all that *could* be said about leadership, what must be conveyed to next generation leaders?

I identified five concepts that serve as the outline of this book. These represent what I believe to be the irreducible minimum, the essentials for next generation leaders:

1. COMPETENCE

Leaders must channel their energies toward those arenas of leadership in which they are most likely to excel.

2. COURAGE

The leader of an enterprise isn't always the smartest or most creative person on the team. He isn't necessarily the first to identify an opportunity. The leader is the one who has the courage to initiate, to set things in motion, to move ahead.

3. CLARITY

Uncertain times require clear directives from those in leadership. Yet the temptation for young leaders is to allow uncertainty to *leave them paralyzed*. A next generation leader must learn to be clear even when he is not certain.

4. COACHING

You may be good. You may even be better than everyone else. But without a coach you will never be as good as you could be.

5. CHARACTER

You can lead without character, but you won't be a leader worth following. Character provides next generation leaders with the moral authority necessary to bring together the people and resources needed to further an enterprise.

If God has gifted you to lead, then lead you will. There's no stopping you. More than likely, people have already recognized your gift and are lining up to follow you. My passion is to help equip you to become a leader whose life is marked by qualities that ensure a no-regrets experience for those who choose to follow; a leader who leaves this world in better shape than he found it.

You think that is a stretch?

Think about it: Individuals from your generation will surface as leaders in every field—business, art, politics, economics, math, technology, medicine, religion. Those men and women will shape the future during your lifetime. Nobody knows who they are. You might as well throw your hat into the ring by leveraging your gifts and opportunities for all they're worth. Embracing these five essentials will enable you to do just that.

So let's begin.

SECTION ONE

COMPETENCE

DO LESS, ACCOMPLISH MORE

YOU ARE DOING TOO MUCH!

The secret of concentration is elimination.

[Dr. Howard Hendricks]

It is both natural and necessary for young leaders to try to prove themselves by doing everything themselves. It is natural because, as a leader, you want to set the pace even as you demonstrate that nothing is beneath you. It is necessary because most of the time nobody is around to help. But what may initially be natural and necessary will ultimately limit your effectiveness.

Perhaps the two best-kept secrets of leadership are these:

1. The less you do, the more you accomplish.
2. The less you do, the more you enable others to accomplish.

As a young leader, my biggest mistake was allowing my time to be eaten up with things outside my core competencies. I devoted an inordinate amount of my first seven years in ministry to things I was not good at—things I would *never* be good at. At the same time, I invested little energy in developing my strengths.

I am a good communicator. I am not a good manager.

I am a good visioncaster. I am not good at follow-up. I know how to prepare a message. I am not good at planning an event.

And yet early on I did nothing to hone my communication skills. Instead, I spent a great deal of time trying to become a better manager and a better event planner. When it came to communication, I would often wing it because the time I should have used to prepare talks had been consumed by other things. And this was the one area in which I *could* wing it.

The problem was that somewhere along the way I had bought into the myth that a good leader has to be good at everything. So I operated under the assumption that I had to upgrade my weaknesses into strengths. After all, who would follow a leader who wasn't well-rounded?

After graduate school I went to work for my dad. As a minister to students my primary responsibilities revolved around developing a strategy for involving junior high and high school students in the life of the church.

The fact that this was my first job opportunity after grad school, combined with the reality that I was working for my dad, sent me into the workforce determined to succeed. I felt the need to prove myself by working harder than everyone else around me. I came in early and went home late. I was in constant motion.

But I did not work smart. The majority of my time was devoted to tasks I was not good at. I was eight years into my career before I realized that my real value to our organization lay within the context of my giftedness, not the number of hours I worked.

From that point forward I began looking for ways to

redefine my job description according to what I was good at, rather than simply what I was willing to do. I discovered that there were some balls I had no business juggling. When I finally mustered the courage to let 'em fall to the floor and roll over in the corner, I began to excel in juggling the two or three balls I was created to keep in the air in the first place.

My success attracted others who were committed to the same cause. While we shared the same passion for students, our skill-sets were different. It wasn't long before they began picking up the stray balls I had let fall. The responsibilities I was reluctant to relinquish turned out to be opportunities for others. The very activities that drained me fueled other team members.

Consequently, I began to do more communicating and less event planning. I learned how to spend the majority of my time at the thirty-thousand-foot level while remaining accessible to team members who were closer to the action. I spent more time strategizing and less time problem solving. I became far more proactive about what I allowed on my calendar. I became more mission-driven rather than need-driven, and now I want to give you that same vision as it relates to your core competencies:

ONLY DO WHAT ONLY YOU CAN DO.

This might seem unrealistic from where you sit today. You might even laugh out loud. But once you get past the seeming improbability of this axiom, write it down and work toward it.

What are the two or three things that you and only you are responsible for? What, specifically, have you been hired to do? What is "success" for the person in your position?

Now let's slice it even thinner. Of the two or three things that define success for you, which of those are in line with your giftedness? Of the tasks you have been assigned to do, which of them are you specifically gifted to do?

That is where you must focus your energies. That is your sweet spot. That is where you will excel. Within that narrowed context you will add the most value to your organization. Success within that sphere has the potential to make you indispensable to your employer.

Best of all, you will enjoy what you do.

"Impossible!" you say. "I can't afford to focus my energies on only a percentage of my overall responsibilities!"

Maybe not yet. But you owe it to yourself to identify the areas in which you have the highest probability for success. You owe it to your employer to identify the areas in which you could add the most value to your organization. You can't aim for a target until you have identified it. We're talking about a mind-set here, a perspective, a way of thinking. This is a vision. This is something you must work toward to maximize your potential as a leader.

During the 2001 baseball season, Greg Maddux of the Atlanta Braves had a batting average of .253—average by professional standards. Yet he is one of the most highly sought-after players in the National Baseball League. Why? Because in his role as pitcher, he struck out 173 batters the previous year. His skill with a bat is not what makes him an indispensable part of the lineup. His ninety-mile-an-hour fastball does.

Should he spend more time working on his hitting? Maybe—but certainly not at the expense of his pitching.

Identify the areas in which you are most likely to add unique value to your organization—something no one else can match—then leverage your skills to their absolute max. That’s what your employer expected when he put you on the payroll! More importantly, leveraging yourself generates the greatest and most satisfying return on your God-given abilities.

The moment a leader steps away from his core competencies, his effectiveness as a leader diminishes. Worse, the effectiveness of every other leader in the organization suffers too. In time, a leader who is not leading from the right “zone” will create an unfavorable environment for other leaders.

Let me explain. Using John Maxwell’s one-to-ten leadership scale, score yourself as a leader¹. If you are an exceptional leader, give yourself an eight or a nine. If you consider yourself an average leader, give yourself a five or a six. For the sake of illustration, let’s say that when you’re at the top of your game you are a seven.

Maxwell argues that at a seven, you will attract followers who are fives and sixes. If you were a nine, you would attract sevens and eights. In other words, leaders attract other leaders whose skills come close to matching but rarely surpass their own.

Perhaps you’ve known the frustration of working for someone whose leadership skills were inferior to yours. It probably wasn’t long before you were looking for another place to work. On the other hand, you might know the thrill of working for leaders whose leadership skills were superior to yours.

Such environments probably brought out the best in you.

Now, back to my point. Assuming you are a seven, you will be at your best when you are in your zone—that is, when you are devoting your time to the things you are naturally gifted to do. That’s when you operate as a seven. And as a seven, you will attract fives and sixes. And, if you are secure, other sevens.

Furthermore, you may have seven potential, but outside your core competencies you will lead like a six. If you continue in that mode, you will lose the devotion and possibly the respect of the other sixes around you. In time, you will dumb down the leadership level of your entire organization—everybody suffers.

Like most good principles, this one is somewhat intuitive. It makes sense. Yet many a leader has leaned his shoulder into the wind and forged ahead, determined to do it all and do it all well. In fact, you may get into a head-versus-heart battle of your own as you reflect on the implications of this idea. No doubt your heart leaps with excitement at the thought of concentrating on the areas in which you naturally excel. Intuitively you know that’s the way to go. But your head says, “Wait a minute—it can’t be that simple!”

After challenging hundreds of leaders to play to their strengths, I have identified five primary obstacles to a leader adopting this way of thinking.

1. THE QUEST FOR BALANCE

The first thing that sometimes keeps next generation leaders from playing to their strengths is that the idea of being a balanced or well-rounded leader looks good on paper and sounds compelling coming from behind a lectern, but in reality, it is an unworthy endeavor. Read the biographies of

the achievers in any arena of life. You will find over and over that these were not “well-rounded” leaders. They were men and women of *focus*.

We should strive for balance organizationally, but it is not realistic to strive for balance within the sphere of our personal leadership abilities. Striving for balance forces a leader to invest time and energy in aspects of leadership where he will never excel. When the point person in an organization strives for balance, he potentially robs other leaders of an opportunity to perform at the top of their game.

My current context for leadership is the local church. Like most churches, ours has a component that focuses exclusively on high school students. The person who tackles that responsibility is usually someone who excels in leading people from the platform. Student pastors are often animated, pied-piper individuals.

The fellow who leads that charge at North Point is not. Kevin Ragsdale is a great example of a singularly focused, highly effective leader. Yet Kevin’s strength is administration. By his own admission, Kevin is not a great platform personality. Rather than waste his time trying to become proficient in an area where he may never excel, Kevin has trained and mentored a group of individuals who are gifted communicators and visioncasters.

In other words, Kevin is not well-rounded in his leadership ability, but his organization is well-rounded. He focuses on what he is gifted in and empowers others to do the same. Consequently, anyone who walks into our student environments will be wowed by the excellence of communication, but equally impressed by the quality of the programming and the organization that supports it.

When a leader attempts to become well-rounded, he brings down the average of the organization's leadership quotient—which brings down the level of the leaders around him. Don't strive to be a well-rounded leader. Instead, discover your zone and stay there. Then delegate everything else.

2. FAILURE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN AUTHORITY AND COMPETENCE

The second reason leaders don't always play to their strengths is that they have yet to distinguish between authority and competency. Every leader has authority over arenas in which he has little or no competence. When we exert our authority in an area where we lack competence, we can derail projects and demotivate those who have the skills we lack.

On any given Sunday morning I have the authority to walk into our video control room and start barking out orders. The fact that I don't know the first thing about what's going on in there does not diminish my authority. Eventually the crew would do what I asked them to do. But the production would suffer horribly. If I were to do that Sunday after Sunday, our best and brightest volunteers would leave. Eventually our paid staff would start looking for something else to do as well.

There is no need to become an expert in, or even to understand, every component of your organization. When you try to exercise authority within a department that is outside your core competencies, you will hinder everything and everyone under your watch. If you fail to distinguish between authority and competence, you will exert your influence in ways that damage projects and people.

To put it bluntly, there are things you are responsible for that you should keep your nose out of.

3. INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN COMPETENCIES AND NONCOMPETENCIES

Leaders who are successful in one arena often assume competency in arenas where in fact they have none. As a result, they miss opportunities to leverage their strengths. As we will discuss later, success is an intoxicant, and intoxicated people seldom have a firm grasp on reality. Successful leaders tend to assume that their core competencies are broader than they actually are.

Worse, the more successful an individual is, the less likely it is that anyone will bring this unpleasant fact to his attention. Consequently, a leader considered an expert in one area is often treated as an expert in others as well.

Leaders who are not in touch with their own weaknesses feel that they are as good as anybody else in their organization at anything that pertains to leadership. Many have even bought into the false notion that great leaders have no weaknesses. In their minds, to admit weakness is to diminish their effectiveness. Such leaders tend to hide their weaknesses, assuming they ever discover them.

Recently I received a call from a board member of an international organization. He wanted my advice about how to handle a conflict between the board and the founder of the organization, who was serving as president. The president was a gifted visioncaster who had raised a great deal of capital for the company. In fact, the success of this organization was due in large part to his ability to communicate effectively to a wide range of audiences.

But he was not a particularly great businessman. The board wanted to hire a top-notch CFO, but the president believed he could continue to oversee that aspect of the organization in his role as president. In recent days the president had made decisions that raised questions about his business savvy. It was apparent to everyone except him that he needed to stay out of the business side and focus his attention on what made him and the company successful to begin with. His problem was not IQ; it was insight. He just didn't get it.

In general, an inability to own up to personal shortcomings is often rooted in some sort of insecurity. This can be easy to see in others but next to impossible to see in ourselves. It takes a certain amount of personal security to admit weakness.

And the truth is that admitting a weakness is a sign of strength. Acknowledging weakness doesn't make a leader less effective. On the contrary, in most cases it is simply a way of expressing that he understands what everyone else has known for some time. When you acknowledge your weaknesses to the rest of your team, it is never new information.

4. GUILT

Some leaders don't play only to their strengths because they feel guilty delegating their weaknesses.

This is where I struggle. I assume everybody hates to do the things I hate to do. For years I felt guilty delegating responsibilities that I really didn't want to get involved with in the first place. It took me a while to realize that the leaders around me were energized by the very things that drained the life out of me.

As I mentioned earlier, planning and producing events is not one of my strengths. Planning just about anything is terribly stressful to me. Early in my career I would apologetically delegate event planning, incorrectly assuming that everyone dreaded this type of thing as much as I did. Yet I assumed I was doing everybody a favor when I took responsibility for planning and producing events.

Fortunately for our entire organization, I discovered that I was surrounded by leaders whose adrenal glands went into overdrive at the prospect of planning an event. Not only were they good at it; they enjoyed it! I have to laugh when I think about how diplomatic my leadership team was as they pried my hands from certain events.

Remember, everybody in your organization benefits when you delegate responsibilities that fall outside your core competency. Thoughtful delegation will allow someone else in your organization to shine. Your weakness is someone's opportunity.

5. UNWILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP OTHER LEADERS

There is some truth to the adage "If you want it done right, do it yourself." Sometimes it really is easier and less time-consuming to do things yourself than to train someone else. But leadership is not always about getting things done "right." Leadership is about getting things done through other people. Leaders miss opportunities to play to their strengths because they haven't figured out that great leaders work through other leaders, who work through others. Leadership is about multiplying your efforts, which automatically multiplies your results.

As one author put it:

We accomplish all that we do through delegation—either to time or to other people.... Transferring responsibility to other skilled and trained people enables you to give your energies to other high-leverage activities. Delegation means growth, both for individuals and for organizations.²

Every once in a while I will hear someone in leadership complain about the performance or competency of the people around him. When a leader can't find someone to hand things off to, it is time for him to look in the mirror. We must never forget that the people who follow us are exactly where we have led them. If there is no one to whom we can delegate, it is our own fault.

Many examples in history underscore the centrality of this catalytic leadership principle. Each illustrates the fact that you never know what hangs in the balance of a decision to play to your strengths.

Oddly enough, it was the prudent application of this principle that enabled the fledgling first-century church to consolidate its gains and capitalize on its explosive growth, without losing focus or momentum.