

*“The Leader Habit”*  
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The better your leadership habits, the better you will perform as a leader—and the more successful you will be. In fact, nearly half (43 to 47 percent) of your everyday behavior at work and in life is habitual and processed automatically, without your conscious awareness.

At this point, it should be clear that the question at the heart of leadership development isn't, “Who has the ability to be a great leader, but, what's the best way to develop great leaders?”

We regard books and classes as the ultimate way to learn because they often seem to be the easiest solutions, and because they're the most familiar. It turns out that books and classes aren't the best way to learn new skills. There are a number of reasons why traditional classroom and book-learning approaches to leadership development aren't effective. One is simply that we forget most of what we read about or are taught in the classroom. The second reason why traditional leadership development is ineffective is that, during training, people acquire mainly knowledge, not skills. Skills are what make us better at actually doing things, and skills are only developed through a systematic exercise regime known as deliberate practice, which is very different from acquiring conceptual knowledge.

Like playing the piano, leadership is more about skills than knowledge. The only way to become a better leader is to improve your leadership skills through deliberate, sustained practice—something traditional leadership training rarely provides. We are creatures of habit, personally and professionally, and no amount of classroom instruction or book learning alone can build the habits that will make us better leaders. Remember that, at its core, leadership is nothing more than a set of habits.

Habits are most effectively formed by repeatedly pairing the same cue with the same behavior through deliberate practice. It's the consistency of practice—the same cue paired with the same behavior over and over again—that results in the formation of a habit. Behaviors that are repeatedly rewarded turn into habits. both a cue and a reward need to be present for a behavior to turn into a habit. Simple behaviors are more likely to become habits than complex ones. It means you will have more success if you first break down a complex behavior into smaller behaviors—a process psychologists call chunking.

Finally, behaviors that are consistent become habits faster. The trifecta of simple, individual, and consistent is the key to understanding which behaviors have the highest potential to quickly become habits. If you want to build a new habit, you must look for a naturally occurring, embedded cue to pair it with.

Cues that are more difficult to spot do not lend themselves to automatic behaviors and are less likely to form habits. The Leader Habit Formula is grounded in event-based cues.

The only way to turn your desired leadership micro-behaviors into habits is through deliberate practice. There are many reasons why most New Year's resolutions fail; one is that people just don't practice long enough for a habit to form. It took an average of sixty-six days for the students to start doing their behavior automatically without thinking about it, and that's the number of days I recommend as the minimum practice for each Leader Habit exercise. The exact amount of time it takes you to form a particular habit is not important, as long as you actually form the habit.

Your personality determines which behaviors are intrinsically rewarding for you because it is inherently satisfying to act in ways that are consistent with your personality. People get more satisfaction from work that allows them to express their personality. Behaviors that are consistent with our personality are more likely to become habits because we naturally derive satisfaction from doing them. If you enjoy doing something, you're more likely to keep doing it. So, if you want to be successful at turning leadership skills into habits, you need to pick skills that you will enjoy practicing.

Here are some Key "Personality Traits" that will set the stage for much of what follows:

- **Outgoing**
- **Curious**
- **Organized**
- **Ambitious**
- **Avid Learner**
- **Resilient**
- **Caring**

For example, leaders who score too high on Caring run the risk of being "too nice" and too eager to please others. Their desire to be liked may negatively affect their performance to the point that they are easily swayed and let others take advantage of them. They may actively avoid conflict and confrontations. Leaders low on Caring sometimes may be perceived as insensitive to others' feelings.

Developing leadership skills and turning them into habits takes time and sustained practice. The shortcut to rapid leadership development is finding your keystone habit. Focusing on people actually resulted in slightly higher team productivity than focusing on results. To achieve the best results, leaders need both groups of skills—effective leaders must get things done while focusing on people. In order to be a great leader, you, too, will need to develop skills in both getting things done and focusing on people. The Habit Formula is about acquiring and strengthening skills through deliberate practice.

The second reason why individual development plans fail is one we've already encountered; in fact, it's the same reason why most training and leadership development programs fail: They focus on acquisition of knowledge rather than skills and habits. The familiar methods and tools of knowledge-based instruction simply aren't effective at developing skills. The basic framework for each exercise is always the same: A cue is paired with a behavior that you do in response to the cue.

Reading this book won't make you a better leader unless you put the concepts into practice.

Here are 22 essential skill sets to develop to become an excellent leader and to develop other excellent leaders

## **“Getting Things Done”**

### **Planning and Executing**

#### **1. Manage Priorities**

If you cannot readily break down the strategy into smaller tasks or cannot prioritize such tasks, you will struggle to bring your team's activities and resources into line with the organization's planned objectives.

#### **2. Planning & organizing your work**

#### **3. Delegating well**

#### **4. Creating urgency**

### **Solving Problems and Making Decisions**

#### **5. Analyzing information**

#### **6. Thinking through solutions**

#### **7. Making good decisions**

#### **8. Focusing on customers**

### **Leading Change**

#### **9. Selling the vision**

#### **10. Innovating**

#### **11. Managing risk**

## **“Focusing On People”**

My research team and I identified eleven people-oriented leadership skills, which are grouped into three categories: Persuasion & Influence, Growing People & Teams, and Interpersonal Skills.

### **Persuasion and Influence**

#### **12. Influencing others**

#### **13. Overcoming individual resistance**

#### **14. Negotiating well**

#### **15. Empowering others**

Allocate an appropriate level of decision-making authority so that others don't feel overwhelmed by responsibility at one extreme or micromanaged at the other. People grow when they are empowered to do so—when they own their decisions, feel personally responsible for outcomes, and directly experience the consequences of their actions. To truly empower others, you must allow them to come up with their own solutions to the issues they are responsible for. Effective leaders monitor progress without micromanaging. After someone comes to you with a problem or issue, ask questions instead of offering solutions and advice by saying, “What makes this a problem and what have you already tried?”

#### **16. Mentoring and Coaching**

People don't develop skills by taking a class or reading a book. It's your job as their leader to actively help them develop them through feedback, challenging assignments, suggestions, and reflection.

#### **17. Building team spirit**

### **Interpersonal Skills**

#### **18. Building strategic relationships**

#### **19. Showing you care**

#### **20. Listening actively**

Ask open-ended rather than close-ended questions.

#### **21. Communicating clearly**

The structure of your message is as important as the words you choose. A message organized around a few key points is more effective than one that delivers the same information without a clear structure.

## **22. Speaking with Charisma**

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Helping others develop these essential skill sets:

When coaching or mentoring others, you can only be successful if the people you are working with are motivated to change. People who are the worst at a task have the most unrealistic self-image—they think they are much better than they actually are. We have been taught that giving critical feedback is the best way to get people to change, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth. People feel most comfortable when their behavior matches their definition of who they are—The further away critical feedback is from our self-image, the more likely we are to dismiss or rationalize it.

If you want to help someone change, keep your advice to yourself and accept that their motivation to change has to come from within. You can't coerce people to learn new skills or change their behavior. All you can do is to support them through their own development journey. This is as true of leadership development as anything else. Help people pick a simple daily exercise and practice it until the new behavior becomes a habit.

Making people aware of their successes is a simple and effective way to increase their self-efficacy. It's best to help people develop the internal tension between their self-image and their actual behavior. Life changes constantly, yet we bring our habitual responses with us to every situation we encounter, for better or for worse.