

MAXWELL MOMENT**The Bookends of Success**

by Dr. John C. Maxwell

NASCAR drivers know the importance of starting in the right place. Before a race even begins, they compete with one another in the hopes of earning the best starting position. At qualifying runs, held the week prior to the official race, each driver speeds around the racetrack in a timed performance. The driver with the fastest time earns pole position - or the right to begin the race in front of the other cars. A driver in pole position doesn't have to be concerned about passing anyone in order to win the race. All he or she must do is hold their position in order to win.

Conversely, a driver who does poorly in the trial run must begin the race in the worst possible position - at the very back of the pack. Stuck behind the other racecars, the disadvantaged driver has virtually no chance of winning. To finish first, he or she would have to pass every other car on the track during the course of the race.

In addition to starting strong, a NASCAR driver understands that his or her performance depends on finishing well. In a 500-mile race, leading for 499 miles is meaningless if a driver isn't in front at the checkered flag. Regardless of a driver's skill maneuvering the car early in the race, if he or she crashes or loses focus toward the end, the driver will forfeit the lead and lose the race. Nobody wins points for their position in the middle of the race; rather, each driver is assigned a place based on how he or she finishes.

THE BOOKENDS OF SUCCESS

Great leaders understand the two bookends of success: starting and finishing. We generally think about them in terms of doing a task or project. However, what's true in our approach to projects is also true in our approach to each day. How we spend our mornings and evenings has a tremendous bearing on the course of our leadership.

I use my morning to set up a game plan for the day. During this time, I allow no interruptions. I never schedule breakfast meetings, and I isolate myself from distractions. I do not permit myself to strategize years down the road or to project my thoughts months into the future. Rather, I narrow my focus to the upcoming 24 hours. I ask myself: "Just for today, how can I be a success?" Viewing life in 24-hour increments, I place a premium on each day. I try to make each one a masterpiece.

During the evening, I reflect on my day. By reflecting, I translate my day's experiences into learning opportunities. This process solidifies in my mind the

lessons I've discovered or bits of knowledge I've uncovered. Reflecting also gives me the space to assess my progress on the goals I made during the morning.

Relaxation is another important part of my evening routine. I make a point to put my leisure time into activities that replenish me by refueling my energy. For me, such activities include spending quality time with my wife, reading a book, or studying Scriptures. Relaxation puts me in a good emotional state, lifts my spirits, and reminds me of the joys of life.

When I neglect to carve out time in the morning to plan my day, I notice adverse effects. First, I don't live my day on purpose. Instead of choosing where to invest my time, I cede control of my schedule to whatever circumstances happen to arise. Second, I squander my energy. Since I don't outline clear goals for my day, I float from one activity to another without getting anything done. Finally, when I skip my morning planning time, I feel overwhelmed. Since I'm ambitious, I have a propensity to bite off more than I can chew. If I don't focus my attention, the weight of my numerous involvements begins to drag me down.

When I am not intentional about setting aside evening time for relaxation, I encounter negative symptoms, too. First, I get uptight. My times of reflection and relaxation act like valves that release stress from my life. If I don't guard those times, I get tense, my thoughts are more negative, and my health suffers. Second, I lose passion. My leisure times fuel me. If I am not intentional about putting time into my favorite activities, then life loses its luster. Third, I miss chances to grow. When I don't reflect on the meaningful moments from each day, I rob myself of the benefits of experience.

SUMMARY

Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is out of reach. That's why today matters. Leaders who value each day know the importance of starting well and finishing strong. In the mornings, they focus their energies on key tasks, and in the evenings, they replenish themselves. By mastering the bookends of success, leaders position themselves to make an impact every day.

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LEADERSHIP@LARGE

Self-Awareness

Many years ago there lived a vain and pompous emperor who was overly concerned with his appearance. He spent lavishly on clothes and would change outfits almost hourly every day. He loved to parade himself through his kingdom so that all could note his exquisite taste and handsome appearance.

One day, two swindlers approached the emperor, posing as tailors. They claimed to have invented a revolutionary fabric for the emperor. According to the tailors, the cloth was surpassingly beautiful with its elaborate and intricate design. In addition, the cloth had a special power - it was invisible to anyone who was stupid or unfit for his or her position.

Never one to deny himself the latest fashion, the emperor fell prey to the swindlers' story, and he ordered them to make him a new suit out of their innovative fabric. He resolved to use the magic material to determine which of his subjects were suitable for their roles and which were not.

The swindlers called for the finest silks and supplies to construct the magical suit for the emperor. Of course, they merely pocketed the materials and pretended to be weaving the emperor's clothes.

While waiting, the emperor became concerned about his new outfit. "What if I can't see the clothes," he wondered, "What if I'm not fit to be emperor? Worried, he sent his wisest and most trusted advisors to report on his new clothes.

One by one, the royal advisors dropped in to gaze upon the emperor's famous clothes. During each visit, the swindlers told of the magical powers of the robes - they were invisible to anyone who was stupid or unfit for their position.

Obviously, none of the advisors could see the clothing. Yet, rather than suspecting the tailors of fraud, the advisors were duped, each believing his own stupidity was blinding him to the magic clothes. Fearful of being discovered as unwise, every one of the advisors claimed to have seen the emperor's new clothes. "What delightful colors!" they reported to the emperor. "How perfectly cut and fashioned!" they exclaimed.

Upon hearing the reports of his trusted advisors, the emperor was exuberant. He decided to hold a special parade the following morning to model his new clothes in front of his subjects. Word of the emperor's beautiful clothes and their magical powers spread like wildfire throughout the kingdom.

Early in the morning, the emperor's attendants came to help him dress. Like the advisors, the attendants had tricked themselves into believing that the garments were real. Upon being presented with his new clothes, the emperor was appalled. The clothes were invisible to him. However, never one to be flustered, the emperor gamely pretended to be in awe of his new suit of clothes. "What an exquisite outfit!" he bellowed.

At first, the emperor felt uncomfortable in his new garb (which was no garb at all). Yet, he refused to admit that he couldn't see the clothes. "After all," the emperor reasoned, "if everyone else can see the clothes, then they must be real."

The time came for the parade to start, and the emperor strolled through the streets in the middle of the royal procession. Assembled along the roadways, the shopkeepers, bakers, millers, and carpenters showered the emperor with compliments on his new clothes.

Now, the emperor was really quite naked, but even the peasants bought into the lie perpetuated by the swindling tailors. To a man, they all assumed the emperor must be wearing clothes, and they were ashamed not to be able to see his fine attire.

The king paraded through the streets for a long while until a young boy's loud cry bought the procession to a halt. "The emperor isn't wearing any clothes!!!"

A murmur went through the crowd, and everyone soon agreed that the emperor was indeed not wearing anything. Mortified, the emperor ran as fast as he could to the safety of his castle. As for the swindlers, they escaped the kingdom with a handsome sum of money, and a lifetime of laughs.

SELF-AWARENESS

The story of the emperor's new clothes is revealing of human nature. We attempt to guise ourselves with an image of intelligence and confidence. We act like we know it all, and we have it all together. However, our true identity finds its way to the surface. We make errors, lack wisdom, or fail to exercise good judgment.

Unwittingly, we all expose our flaws and knowledge gaps, and we parade them around the office from meeting to meeting. "Whether you acknowledge your weaknesses or not, everyone still sees them," says Chris Musselwhite of Inc.com. "So rather than conceal them, the person who tries to hide weaknesses actually highlights them, creating the perception of a lack of integrity and self-awareness." When we attempt to deny our imperfections, our credibility with others diminishes.

In his article "Self-Awareness and the Effective Leader," Musselwhite suggests behaviors we can practice as leaders to enhance self-awareness. First, we can solicit feedback to discover how colleagues and constituents perceive us. Second, we can ask questions and permit others to add input into our decision-making. Third, we can improve as listeners.

"I'm sorry" and "I don't know," may be two of the most difficult phrases for humans to verbalize. However, no one is perfect, and we all make mistakes from time to time. The key is to be self-aware - to acknowledge when we're clueless and when we've failed. Doing so yields authenticity, and makes us leaders more worthy of being followed.

To read the complete fable, The Emperor's New Clothes, please visit:
<http://hca.gilead.org.il/emperor.html>.

Also, be sure to check out [Chris Musselwhite's thoughts on self-awareness](#).

Amazing Grace

Courage. Wisdom. Strength. Vision. Influence. We have no trouble associating these words with leadership. Grace doesn't usually make the list.

After all, grace is a rather touchy-feely word, isn't it? Preschool teachers have grace. Ice skaters move with grace. Elderly women are named Grace. It's not exactly a word packed with power. At least, not at first glance.

What exactly does "grace" signify in a leadership context? According to Ray Blunt of www.govleaders.org, grace means acknowledging and accepting imperfections, both in ourselves and others. When we infuse grace into our lives, the advantages we reap are manifold.

However, grace doesn't usually find its way into boardrooms, strategy sessions, or creative meetings. Apparently, we see ourselves as too tough to carry grace into the workplace, or perhaps we deem the business climate too harsh for grace.

Whatever the case, grace gets left behind when we hit the office. Instead, we carp about a teammate's shortcomings, pile cutting remarks on top of a co-worker's failure, or complain about a leader's missteps. We pass judgment quickly and effortlessly. We hold a magnifying glass above the mistakes of those around us, while we try to maintain a facade of perfection.

Without grace, a leader faces the twin perils of insecurity and irrelevance. On the other hand, by apprehending the quality of grace, a leader becomes labeled as secure and worthy or respect.

SECURITY

Leaders who accept their faults are not threatened when another person glimpses their flaws. Aware of their shortcomings, they surround themselves with teammates who possess strengths in the areas where they are weak. Conversely, leaders who haven't come to grips with their shortcomings become defensive when confronted with their weaknesses. Ill at ease, such a leader is consumed by covering up their inabilities. They may spend so much time glossing over their flaws that they neglect build upon their strengths. Deceived by the myth of well-roundedness, they drain themselves trying to fix weaknesses rather than accepting themselves for who they are.

RESPECT

Leaders who accept the faults of others earn a reputation for being likable and worthy of respect. In tune with their own flaws, such leaders are more patient and understanding when those around them fail. While holding others accountable for their actions, graceful leaders demonstrate willingness to help others learn from mistakes, and they are open to granting others a second chance. On the other hand, ungracious leaders create a climate of fear by punishing failure. Intolerant of the blemishes in those around them, they have a harsh, unpleasant aura that drives others away.

SUMMARY

While grace may be a soft leadership competency, it's an indispensable one. Secure leaders recognize their faults and bear the failures of others, and the poise and patience of a gracious leader will be rewarded with the respect of those they lead.

Ray Blunt has authored a valuable article covering the topic of grace and dealing with failures: ["The Failures of Leaders"](#)

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Built to Serve: How to Drive the Bottom Line with People-First Practices by Dan J. Sanders (McGraw-Hill, 2008)

Two thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth offered a revolutionary leadership concept: The measure of a leader can be found in his or her willingness to serve others. Forty years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. sounded the same refrain with his inspirational words: "Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve."

Dan J. Sanders subscribes to the same philosophy of leadership, which he outlines in *Built to Serve*. In the book's introduction, Sanders charges the prevailing leadership culture with breakdown. In his eyes, the drive for profits has been accompanied by a disregard for people. His goal is to flip the model on its head so that people are seen as the gateway to financial prosperity. Throughout *Built to Serve*, he concentrates on the avenues whereby leaders serve their constituents: giving vision, building culture, and extending relationship.

Sanders makes his biggest statement early on when he writes, "An organization's ability to serve will be the last tool that can provide a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace." Innovative ideas are copied, inventive processes are replicated, and talented people come and go, but a culture of servanthood endures. According to Sanders, companies scrambling to differentiate themselves from rivals may be wise to devote their energies into developing a culture of service.

Chapters in *Built to Serve* are titled "aisles," in honor of Sanders' occupation as CEO of United supermarkets. In each aisle, italicized text guides the reader to main points. Summaries at the end of each aisle recap key ideas. LW subscribers may want to browse Aisle 10 in which Sanders communicates his model of balanced decision-making. His model derives from three central components: the seller's intuition, customer preferences, and empirical data. A decision made in the absence of any of the three perspectives runs the risk of ignoring pertinent information.

Often times, books that are the offspring of vigorous research end up feeling somewhat impersonal. Dan Sanders gives *Built to Serve* a degree of warmth and sociability by recounting stories from his personal experiences. Whether standing on a pitcher's mound in a college baseball game, flying 70,000 feet in the air onboard a U-2 military aircraft, or walking through the aisles of a United supermarket, readers are invited to share memorable moments from Sanders' leadership journey.

Readers hunting for novelty may not be impressed by Sanders. The material in *Built to Serve* is standard fare within the leadership genre. However, although Sanders' content may be commonplace, words such as "timeless" and "tested" would also be suitable designations for the ideas he offers. Endorsed by leadership gurus Stephen Covey (who writes the afterword) and Ken Blanchard (who authors the foreword), *Built to Serve* should be well-received by anyone who pulls it from the bookshelf.

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QUOTES

Education

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." ~ John Dewey

"Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere." ~ Chinese Proverb

"Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value." ~ Albert Einstein

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." ~ Alvin Toffler

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." ~ William Butler Yeats

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