



A 360 Degree Leader

In the book *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*, John C. Maxwell shares 7 myths of leading from the middle. Myth #1 says, "I can't lead if I'm not at the top." 360 degree leaders influence people at every level of the organization. By helping others, they in turn help themselves. The true measure of leadership is influence. Leadership is dynamic, and

the right to lead must be earned individually with each person you meet. There are five levels of leadership according to Maxwell. The first is position (rights), where people follow because they must. Next is permission (relationships), where people follow because they want to. The third level is production (results), where people follow because of what you have done for the organization. After the third level, level four describes people development (reproduction), where people follow because of what you have done for them. Finally, level five is pinnacle (respect), where people follow because of who you are and what you represent. Influencing others is a matter of disposition, not position. To do nothing in the middle is to create more weight for the top leader to move. Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit.

Myth #2 says, "When I get to the top, I'll learn to lead." If you want to succeed, you need to learn as much as you can about leadership before you have a leadership position. Good leadership is learned in the trenches. Leading as well as they can wherever they are is what prepares leaders for more and greater responsibility. To become the person you desire to be, you must start now to adopt the thinking, learn the skills, and developing the habits of the person you wish to be.

Myth #3 says, "If I were on the top, then people would follow me." People who have no leadership experience have a tendency to overestimate the importance of a leadership title. A position gives you a chance and opportunity, but only with time you will earn your level of influence.

Myth #4 says, "When I get to the top, I'll be in control." The desire to improve an organization and the belief you're capable of doing it are often the marks of a leader. The desire to innovate, to improve, to create, and to find a better way, are all leadership characteristics. Without experience, being the top person in an organization would likely result in overestimating the amount of control you have at the top.

Myth #5 says, "When I get to the top, I'll no longer be limited." As you move up the ladder you may find that the amount of responsibility you take on increases faster than the amount of authority you receive. As demands increase, good leaders go to their people to connect, find common ground, and empower them to succeed. In some ways, leaders have less freedom as they move up. Rights decrease as you climb in the organization, and responsibilities increase.

Myth #6 says, "I can't reach my potential if I'm not the top leader." Strive for the top of your game, not the top of the organization. Know how to influence from whatever position you find yourself in. Sometimes you can make the greatest impact from somewhere other than first place.

Lastly, myth #7 says, "If I can't get to the top, then I won't try to lead." Do not define success as being "on top." If you believe you are not successful because you aren't on the top, then you will become frustrated and could become a hindrance to the organization. Leadership is not meant to be an all or nothing proposition. You can make an impact from anywhere in the organization. A big part of leadership occurs from the middle of an organization. You do not have to be held hostage due to your circumstances or position. Learn to develop your influence and become a 360 degree leader by learning to lead up, across, and down.

-Amy

Maxwell, J. (2005). *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*. Thomas Nelson, Inc.