

## Book Review

### **Book Summary of *The Five Levels of Leadership* by John C Maxwell, reviewed March 27<sup>th</sup> 2021 by Charlie**

*The Five Levels of Leadership* breaks leadership into levels of a pyramid. John Maxwell presents leadership as not a goal to arrive at, but a mentality, a journey. This is one of the many books that we read that aligns with our community philosophy, particularly because Maxwell doesn't believe that only one person in a company or organization is a leader, but that multiple people can be. In our community, everyone is a leader, they are just at different stages of their leadership journey.

#### **Level One: Position**

Positional leadership is essentially only a title, Manager, CEO, Captain. But what does this mean? On being awarded this title, you would be mistaken in thinking you had arrived, that now you are a leader and there is nothing more you need to do. Positional leadership is only the beginning, the springboard from which to launch your journey as a leader. The positive side of positional leadership is that it means someone believed in your ability or potential enough to give you this position. This can be a necessary confidence boost to fast-track your journey, or open up a path you might not have considered. It is also an opportunity to develop your skills as a leader.

However, just because you have a title, doesn't mean people will like working for you. At Level One, people follow because they have to – you could fire them or take away benefits if they don't – but this compromises productivity and teamwork as your employees may feel no loyalty for you, each other or the company. This can especially be a problem if you “pull rank” - people often react badly to this and can be one of the reasons there is often a high turn over of positional leaders.

In our community, responsibility is taken not given, but a leadership role is sometimes given. Although often we create our own leadership roles, one of the most common ways we create positional leadership roles is to give a guide school graduate the opportunity to teach the next school. They are given the leadership but it is up to them to take responsibility for it. They can use this as an opportunity to refine their own guiding skills and share this with new students, or they can choose to not take responsibility which has a negative impact on everyone and the mentor guide who is meant to be assisting them now has to take full responsibility for making the guide school a success.

#### **Level Two: Permission**

Permission leadership is about building relationships with your employees, in this way they choose to follow you, effectively giving your permission to lead them. As a permission leader the relationships you build with your team allow you to identify their strong suits, directing them towards tasks that fit their abilities and interests. This makes for a much more enjoyable workspace, people are more likely to enjoy working for you and with each other. This increases the energy level of the group as each person feels like a valuable member of the team and makes communication more open, which builds trust.

However, this level still has its downsides. As the leader, the responsibility is on you to initiate the relationship building and some members of the team might not be open to this style of leadership. They might find this type of leadership too soft because it doesn't fit with the typical hierarchical style of leadership. This opens you up to being taken advantage of by “takers” who seek to maximize their benefit from the relationship but don't give anything in return. This is a risk that you have to weigh the pros and cons of. Permission is also a two-way street. It isn't enough for your team to be open with you, in return, you also have to be open, this is part of gaining trust.

With no hierarchy in our community, everyone can be a leader to the extent they choose and as a supportive team, we are all comfortable with being led by one of our community partners in one

moment and then taking responsibility for leading the next.

### **Level Three: Production**

Production leadership builds on permission to generate results. It's not enough to build relationships with your team, you also have to get the job done together. Production builds your credibility as a leader as you have shown you can produce results and lead a team who also produces results. Level Three is also about leading by example. Do you uphold the same standards you expect of your team? How do you hold yourself accountable if you don't? If your team sees that you play by the same rules they are expected to, this furthers your credibility. Production also helps make your vision real, you have something physical to support your effort. It can show you where adjustments are needed – you can't change something if you have nothing to start with. Accomplishment is rewarding and contagious, it builds up momentum within the team to continue having successes. This is one of the foundations of team building as the success is a team success. Everyone was involved in creating it and everyone can celebrate the accomplishment.

Of course, as with every level of leadership, there are still downsides. Just because you are productive, doesn't necessarily mean you are a leader. Although being able to make things happen is required to be a good leader, you have to be able to make things happen that benefit the team, not just yourself. If you can't do this, you're not a leader. Being a production leader can generate a very heavy feeling of responsibility for making results happen. You have to be able to assess how much results are something you can make happen and how much it is down to your team's interests and actions. Being a leader also requires you to make difficult decisions, and coming to terms with the fact that making a wrong decision is often better than making no decision. Just because you've reached Level Three doesn't mean you can forget about Level Two, you still need to continue developing those relationships to ensure productivity is a team effort.

In our community, we can easily assess if our productivity benefits the team or just ourselves by asking how we are contributing and who benefits. Being productive on something that has been created or planned as a team is another easy way to see that we are on the right track. If we are being productive on something that is benefiting the community, we can be sure we are production leaders and not producing for our own benefit.

### **Level Four: People Development**

People development is all about creating new leaders, developing the people you work with who have the most potential as leaders to take on leadership positions. This is an investment in the perpetuity of the organization as there are more people who can lead the vision. Developing leadership skills in others allows them to develop their own traits and increase their sense of value and connection with the organization. Maxwell provides a formula for moving tasks onto others as they develop their leadership skills: if a person can do a given task at 80% of the leader's skills or better, the leader can give them that task to be responsible for. Developing others develops you as well, you learn about your style of leadership, mentorship or teaching, it is also very fulfilling to see someone grow under your guidance.

But people development isn't easy and it's the reason many leaders stay at Level Three. Being a leader means to put the people you are developing ahead of yourself, self-centredness can get in the way of this, as well as personal insecurity, such as if you derive value from being the only person in your organization who can perform a certain task, you may feel threatened that others will overtake your abilities and you will become redundant. Not thinking ahead enough can mean you don't think about the need for other leaders. If you aren't committed enough to stick with what can be a long journey with your leaders-in-training, you won't help them develop efficiently.

Through all our mentor guide schools, we develop leaders in our community who go on to lead other community partners and guests. We are also doing it through the process of knowledge transfer, sharing a skill or piece of knowledge with someone else that will enhance the community. To do this, it is

essential we take full responsibility for our actions and the outcome.

### **Level Five: Pinnacle**

Pinnacle leadership goes beyond creating leaders, it means to create leaders who go on to create other leaders, to create a culture of leadership in your organization that will continue after you have moved on. Level Five doesn't mean only the leader is Level Five, the entire organization is Level Five because they are led by the principles that define Level Five leadership. This increases the success of the entire organization not just now, but into the future.

Just like Level One, one of the downsides of Level Five is the mistaken belief that you have arrived. You might be at the highest level of leadership, but if you stop developing other leaders, you are no longer Level Five. You need to still be learning and developing personally, otherwise you are stagnating and losing focus.

The example of our mentor guide school is also an example of Level Five leadership in our community. Once we have taught someone to be a guide, they then continue their leadership skills by teaching the next guide school, and someone from this guide school will teach the following one. In this way, a culture of leadership is created. This is also seen in all aspects of our community where there is an ongoing passing of the baton as we progress through different tasks.

Each level of leadership has its place in our community culture, but we are all striving to operate as Level Four or Five leaders, this is one of the ways we can ensure the continuation of our environment into perpetuity. *The Five Levels of Leadership* provides a simple method of assessing where we are at.