

Laws for Positive Leadership

How to be a leader others want to follow.

By Victor Parachin



While serving in the U.S. Army Reserves, Terence T. Griffiths' assignment involved observing companies in his battalion to determine why members were not re-enlisting. He visited one company in Alaska that had greater losses than others. During his stay, the company commander gave a briefing on an upcoming joint military exercise involving the Navy, Air Force and Marines. He informed his troops

that all their leaves would be cancelled. Griffiths could see that the little morale the men had held onto was slipping badly. The commander finished by saying that during the operation there would be another acting commander. He explained with, "I'll be on vacation."

Griffiths immediately understood why that battalion was losing soldiers. They felt no loyalty to their company commander. That incident is a sad but compelling example of negative, ineffective and selfish leadership. Healthy leadership – the type that excels and succeeds – always moves along a more positive path. A positive leadership style inspires, motivates, energizes, unites, generates loyalty and produces results.

Here are 10 laws to follow in order to be a more positive leader in your work, your community, your Toastmasters club and your family.

■ **Give more than you expect others to give.**

Many people are looking out for Number One – themselves. Be the person who looks out for Number Two, Number Three, and so on. "Ask yourself, *How can I give a little more to the people around me? What can I do to lighten their work load? Who can I mentor? How can I provide the best effort?* Go the extra mile on behalf of others. Fashion your leadership style by this wisdom from President Woodrow Wilson: "I do not believe that any man can lead who does not act...under the impulse of a profound sympathy with those whom he leads." Wilson means good leaders don't ask people to do what they would not do themselves. Good leaders are characterized by their ability to give more than they expect others to give.

■ **Combine optimism and perseverance.** That advice comes from Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko's and coauthor of *Copy This!*, a book on his success in leadership. He says the

only antidotes to failures and setbacks are optimism combined with perseverance. Those two qualities empowered Orfalea to succeed despite his struggles with dyslexia throughout his time in school. He says, in his book, that all his life, those same two ingredients have kept him moving forward: "I failed at many jobs when I was younger (like getting fired from a gas station because my handwriting was so bad no one could ever read what I wrote on charge slips). Now I look at setbacks as a sign that there is another, probably better, opportunity elsewhere. I just need to find it." Combine optimism and perseverance, then lead by example. Others who observe your conduct will not only feel inspired but will act the same.

■ **See everyone as a diamond in the rough.** There are no poor performers, only poor leaders who fail to find ways of helping others succeed. They fail to see the potential in every person, leaving it untapped. Rabbi Shlomo Carlbach once spoke to members of Manhattan's Diamond Dealers Club. During a question-and-answer period following his talk, the Rabbi was challenged by one of the attendees who asked why Rabbi Carlbach "wasted" so much of his time with people who were homeless, unemployed, drug addicted and mentally ill. The Rabbi responded by asking the group whether they had ever accidentally thrown out a million-dollar diamond in the rough. "Never!" shouted the group. "An expert would know the worth of a stone he held in his hand."

That gave Rabbi Schlomo an opportunity to educate his audience: "I'll let you in on a little secret, my friends," he said. "I'm also an expert on diamonds. I walk the streets every day, and all I see are the most precious diamonds

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walking past me. Some of them you have to pick up from the gutter and polish a bit. But once you do, oh how they shine! So you see, the most important thing you have to know in life is that everyone, everyone, is a diamond in the rough."

■ **Express appreciation; accept responsibility.** Catherine the Great said, "I praise loudly, I blame softly." Sadly, some leaders are quick to accept credit and even quicker to assign blame. The best leaders reverse that pattern. They

give credit to subordinates for work well done and they do that both privately and publicly. Respected leaders are generous in giving credit where credit is due and are always prepared to accept responsibility when a project fails.

■ **Remain balanced.** Unfortunately, some leaders operate with inflated egos. These types demand rather than command respect. No matter how high you rise or how important you become, remain a balanced person. Operate with a sense of humility. Last February, Joey Cheek won an Olympic gold medal for speed skating. Shortly afterward, he was asked what he learned from winning the gold. His answer is instructive: “Keep things in perspective. I’ve seen the world and met amazing friends through my sport. But it’s not that big a deal. I mean, I skate around the ice in tights. What is important is what I do off the ice.”

■ **Show respect for people around you.** Your words and actions will show how much you value other people’s contributions. Consider the example of Katharine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*. Although she led a powerful and influential newspaper in the nation’s capital, she did so with compassion, kindness, humility and sincerity. Graham was well-known and highly regarded for the humble, respectful way she treated those who worked for the paper.

One who admired her for those qualities was Richard Cohen, a columnist for the *Washington Post*. He tells of a hot, humid Sunday in July when a tent was erected on the Post’s parking lot. “It was for a company party, given for people whose names you never hear – those un-bylined, non-TV-appearing types who take the ads or deliver the paper or maybe just clean the building.” Cohen saw Katharine Graham making her way toward the party. “She was old by then, and walking was difficult for her. She pushed her way up the ramp, moving in a laborious fashion. She had a farm in Virginia, a house in Georgetown, an apartment in New York, and most significantly that hideously hot day, a place on the water in Martha’s Vineyard. Yet here she was...” One of Katharine Graham’s great legacies was the way she treated everyone with respect, whether they were famous and powerful or anonymous and vulnerable.

■ **Treat everyone as family.** Paul Orfalea says his company, Kinko’s, is stronger and better than the competition because he stresses the importance of the personal touch. Referring to his struggle with dyslexia, Orfalea says: “Because I can’t read or write well, I’ve had to trust others to help me get things done – from Danny, my best friend since fourth grade, to Natalie, my wife, to my coworkers. At Kinko’s, I set a policy that most of our communication be done not by written memos, but by talking face-to-face. This made us work closer as a team, and we had better relationships (and more fun!) as a result.”

■ **Be a source of inspiration.** When appropriate, share your wisdom. Offer people insights you have gleaned along the way. Nurture those around you so they expand, enlarge,

grow and do more than they ever thought they could do. John Erskine was a highly regarded American educator, musician and novelist noted for energetic, skilled work in several different fields. Erskine said he learned one of the most valuable lessons of his life when he was only 14 years old. It took place when his piano teacher asked: “How many times a week do you practice and how long do you practice each time?” Erskine said he tried to practice once daily for an hour or more. “Don’t do that,” she responded. “When you grow up, time won’t come in long stretches. Practice in minutes, whenever you can find them – five or 10 before school, after lunch, between chores. Spread your practice throughout the day and music will become a part of your life.”

It was advice he accepted and acted upon. Erskine became a concert pianist who performed with the New York Philharmonic. Later he served as president of the Julliard School of Music and director of the Metropolitan Opera Association. He also went on to teach literature at Columbia University and wrote 45 books. His most famous, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, was written as he commuted to Columbia.

■ **Stress cooperation not competition.** Knute Rockne, the famous American football coach, led his team to many victories by stressing cooperation with teammates versus competition. “I have to get the most energy out of a man and have discovered that it cannot be done if he hates another man. Hate blocks his energy and he isn’t up to par until he eliminates it and develops a friendly feeling (toward all his teammates).”

■ **Maintain a sense of humor.** No one enjoys being around someone who is humorless, heartless, rigid and unable to laugh or enjoy all aspects of life. People who take themselves less seriously are far more pleasant to associate with. No matter how daunting or serious your work, do it with a sense of lightness, merriment and playfulness. An Air Force sergeant was interviewing a young man whose military term was ending. The sergeant asked if the airman would consider re-enlisting. “I wouldn’t re-enlist if you made me a four-star general, gave me a million dollars and Miss America for a roommate!” the man seethed. Obviously the sergeant had a sense of humor. On the form the sergeant simply wrote: “Airman is undecided.”

If that selfish Army commander in Alaska had put into practice only one or two of these tips, he might have prevented the loss of his soldiers’ morale. If he had practiced all 10 tips on a regular basis, his troops would have followed him anywhere, even under hazardous circumstances. Chances are you’ll never have to lead soldiers into combat, but you can earn loyalty, trust and admiration from team members in any organization. Follow these rules and others will follow you. **T**

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