

THE
LEADER'S
POCKET GUIDE



101

**INDISPENSABLE
TOOLS, TIPS, AND
TECHNIQUES
FOR ANY SITUATION**

JOHN BALDONI

Prologue

“When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves.”

—VICTOR FRANKL

FOR SOME TIME READERS HAVE BEEN ASKING ME if I would consider putting my thoughts on coaching in book form. While the idea has always intrigued me, I wanted the opportunity to do more than collect advice. I have taken the time to read and sift through well over a hundred articles and pieces I have written and distilled them into single-thought concepts that are designed to help leaders both emerging and veteran find insight, comfort, and inspiration.

The Leader’s Pocket Guide reflects the issues that develop in the careers and lives of executives, and the short, to-the-point ideas followed by self-reflection mimics what I do in my leadership consulting. Interwoven into these ideas is a rich texture of practical and tactical advice.

New leaders will likely find this book to be fresh and lively. I hope so, but I would also remind them that those in leadership positions know far more than they give themselves credit for, and therefore this book will also provide the reassurance they are seeking. Even experienced leaders will find surprises that will stimulate them to think about issues differently and refine their leadership capabilities.

Augmenting this book is some up-to-date research

focused on the role of leaders and the expectations that followers have for them. Recall the words of Theodor Geisel, who as Dr. Seuss wrote, “Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So . . . get on your way.”

Enjoy the book and lead on!

SELF

“Find out who you are and do it on purpose.”

—DOLLY PARTON

LEADERSHIP HAS OFTEN BEEN DEFINED as a journey. The journey begins with the starting point, and that starting point is the self.

Before you can lead others, you must learn to lead yourself. Bedrock principles of self-leadership begin with the desire to make a positive difference.

Learning what you can do as well as what you cannot do is essential to self-development. Critical to development is a profound understanding of one’s abilities as well as one’s liabilities. Tipping the scales on the side of ability to diminish the liabilities takes a deep sense of awareness. You hone the awareness through trial and error, or what is better known as practice.

Research Says...

According to Hay Group surveys of 4 million employees globally,

63% say:

"My job provides me the opportunity to learn new skills and develop new talents."

56% say:

"I have a good idea of the possible career paths available to me."

52% say:

"I am kept informed about what is required for me to advance at the company."



Research indicates that employees around the world have expectations for professional development. Ultimate responsibility for career development rests with the employee. It is up to him or her to take advantage of the opportunities offered.

1. | How to Know Yourself Better

LEADERS WHO SUCCEED ARE THOSE WHO KNOW THEMSELVES inside and out.

While coming to terms with yourself is a private matter, failing to come to terms with your own limitations as a leader affects your ability to lead. Here are three questions leaders can ask themselves, or a trusted associate or two, about their own managerial performance:

What more do I need? This question might seem easy because a leader will always say she needs more time. Lack of time is often an excuse for failing to address simmering issues or to carry projects through to fruition. Ask yourself and others what you need to do more of; one possible answer might be “doing less.” That is, learn to delegate more and devote your time to thinking.

What else should I be doing? By focusing on less, you may learn to delegate not simply tasks, but also responsibilities. Too often executives feel they need to be engaged in the work when their job is really to engage other people. Let your people do their jobs. If they can’t, find out why. You may need to find employees with different skills sets or you may need to provide your people with additional training, resources, and manpower.

How do I accept feedback? “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them,” says Colin Powell. “They have either lost

confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care.”

None of us welcome bad news about ourselves and our work, but self-aware leaders are those who not only accept it, but invite it, and even seek it out. They do so because they are continually learning.¹



Without self-learning and self-awareness
there can be no personal growth.



Think About...

How you might get more in tune with yourself.

Spend at least a few minutes every day reflecting on how the day went. What went well and what would you like to have done better?

Be mindful of feedback and make a point of thanking people who offer it.

Self-Knowledge = Insight + Practice

2. | Think More Critically

CRITICAL THINKING IS THE ABILITY TO EVALUATE OPTIONS, weigh alternatives, and make informed decisions.

Question assumptions. Critical thinkers ask questions and look to find the what and the why behind every proposition. Often we question assumptions when things go wrong. Crisis can bring out the best critical thinking because it forces you to question how and why you ended up in trouble.

Adopt different perspectives. Take advantage of the diversity represented in today's management landscape. An Indian-trained engineer may not view a problem the way one raised in Iowa will. Both may have the same problem-solving tool kit, but their different experiences provide valuable insights.

See potential. Busting assumptions and harnessing multiple perspectives are deductive skills. Critical thinkers should also have a creative bent that allows them to see opportunities where others see obstacles. For example, one executive may see a production snag as a problem, whereas a savvy thinker must view it as an opportunity to revamp the process to produce something new.

There is one additional aspect of critical thinking that is vital to today's leader: **managing ambiguity.** The speed of business, intertwined as it is with global factors and complex sup-

ply chains, dictates that you will never know all the variables. Therefore, you need to get comfortable with operating in an environment where change is constant and rapid decisions are required.



In a world of growing uncertainty one thing is certain:
we will need sharp critical thinkers who can
size up the situation, realize the potential
where others may not, and seize opportunities
through prompt decision making.



3. | Character Trumps Perfection

INTEGRITY IS THE CORNERSTONE OF SOUND LEADERSHIP. It is what gives managers the character they need to insist on doing the right thing, as well as doing it the right way.

Integrity is not a process; it is a value that is practiced by individuals, managers and employees alike. So it matters what employees do and how they do it.

As a veteran executive once told me, hire for character. Don't expect to develop something that is not there. If a person lacks a moral compass, don't think you can give him one.



Managers, like all of us, want to succeed; and because their success is based upon getting the best people they can to work for them, good managers are on the lookout for talent for their teams.



4. | Yes, It does matter what people think of you

SAVVY EXECUTIVES KNOW that brand is more than a product or service; it is the sum of how and why you connect with consumers and what they think of you.

Since leaders accomplish very little by themselves, they need to bring others together for common purpose. How others perceive the leader is important to encouraging followership.

Followership, which is based upon trust, is a reciprocal act. As historian and leadership author James MacGregor Burns teaches, people follow the leader because they share similar values.

A leader's reputation therefore is essential to creating trust, and in turn getting people to work together to achieve mutually beneficial aims.²



How a leader nurtures his or her reputation is important to creating followership. Reputation is the sum of what a leader accomplishes and how he or she does it.



5. | Add to Your Leadership Brand

YOUR BRAND AS A LEADER is a reflection of how others perceive you.

Leaders are judged by their accomplishments, but those achievements only occur when others believe in the leader. A successful leader's brand relies upon this reciprocity. It's important that you nurture your leadership brand in the right way. Here are some suggestions:

Communicate by example. What a leader says is important, but what a leader does is even more important. People are more likely to follow a leader who follows through on what he promises and lives with the consequences. Failure to meet a deadline isn't necessarily a failure of leadership. Failure to set the right example is.

Stand by your convictions. The true mark of a leader is what she does when things are going poorly. Acting in the name of expediency is the ruin of many a promising executive. A decision is a leadership choice. Good leaders are those who stand up for what they believe and act on those convictions. They may not always win, but you know where they stand and what they stand for.

Radiate hope and confidence. Leaders need to give people a reason to believe in themselves. Leaders are those who can look over the horizon and see the possibilities of what lies ahead. Good leaders are those who can bring others along to see it too. Viewing the future with a sense of hope and then demonstrating confidence to make good things happen is fundamental to leadership.³



When it comes to reputation, *how* you do sometimes matters more than *what* you do. A leader's ability to get things done right will depend upon treating people right. What a leader does is rooted in mission; how a leader does it shapes his legacy.



Think About...

How others regard you and what you do.

Leadership depends upon perception. It should reflect your inner character. But it will not unless you put your character into gear and lead by example.

Think of an example of how you showed others what it means to lead by example. What did it say about your values?

Think of three more examples of situations in which you could live your values and lead by example.

**Leadership Brand =
Authenticity + Connectivity**

6. | Why Accountability Counts

ACCOUNTABILITY IS A CORNERSTONE of organizational cohesiveness.

A sense of accountability holds people responsible for performance and for results. Accountability lies at the root of leadership authenticity. A leader who does not hold himself accountable will find it difficult to lead others. Leadership provides a foundation for effective management: the operational rigor—processes, policies, and people—that must be in place to ensure that an organization runs smoothly.

Accountability underscores management because it is reinforces getting things done right and done on time. A manager who is sloppy in his administration can try to hold people accountable for their results, but when management is loose, results will be sketchy, too.

While management is administrative, leadership is aspirational. It focuses on what must be done to ensure that the organization and its people succeed.

Accountability is essential because the leader must make difficult decisions. A leader who is not accountable to the organization will act in his own self-interest (or for a select few) rather than doing what the organization needs him to do: stand up for what is right.⁴



Accountability matters. Not simply to the leaders but more so to the people in the organization who look to those at the top to manage effectively and lead well.



7. | Making the Choice to Manage

MOVING INTO MANAGEMENT is a huge leap of faith.

For many employees, it means giving up what they really love doing. That's why they're considered promotable in the first place: they're good at their jobs. But too frequently managers-to-be are not asked if they really want to move up, and worse, they're not prepared to manage others. So before you consider moving into management, ask yourself three questions:

Why do you want to manage? Technically competent employees typically enjoy their jobs. Many want to continue being designers, engineers, and scientists; management to them is administrative, not something worthy of their skill set. Ask yourself if you actually want to manage, and if so, why? More money and prestige may be incentives, but they aren't enough to sustain a career.

What job will you be giving up as a manager?

As a manager you will be giving up what got you promoted in the first place. Your competence has been based upon what you do well, be it finance, research, design, or engineering. Moving into management means you will be supervising others who used to do what you did. You need to be comfortable with letting go of what you do well in order to help others do it.

Where will you go for support? Becoming a manager is a big challenge. Know where you can go for help as you learn on the job. A coach or mentor could be a big assist for you. Also seek out management training programs offered through your company or at a local business school.



Those who choose to become managers eventually discover one of the hidden pleasures of management: leading a team for results. Those who succeed in this endeavor are called leaders!

8. | Making the Choice *Not* to Manage

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SAY NO!

Some employees have the gumption (as well as the self-knowledge) to say no to the promotion.

Being a manager can be one step removed from doing work you love doing. Managers spend most of their time providing resources for others to do the work. It can be rewarding, but if you would prefer to focus on your skill set then management may not be for you.

If you are comfortable in your current job and others recognize your value, you can take satisfaction in knowing that you are pursuing your chosen passion rather than becoming a manager.



Think About...

How you make certain that the “buck stops with you” on decisions you have made.

How do you accept consequences for your actions?

Think of a time when someone in authority did not accept consequences for his or her actions. What effect did that have on the organization? What would you have done differently?

Taking responsibility begins with accepting the

responsibility to manage and lead in the first place.
Are you ready to take on that responsibility?

Accountability = Responsibility + Consequence



9. | Develop the Confidence to Lead

ACCOMPLISHMENT NURTURES CONFIDENCE.

Identifying your moments of strength is not the same as writing your curriculum vitae; graduating from college and landing a good job are highlights, of course, but when it comes to self-confidence you want to dig beneath the surface. Here are three related questions you can ask yourself to help you uncover your successful self:

What do you do well? This question opens the door for you to itemize the abilities that have enabled you to succeed to date. Focus on your talents: what you do well. For example, you may possess strong conceptual skills. You may be one who can think strategically, a person who can look at the big picture and see opportunities where others see only blue sky. Such abilities are your strengths; you owe it to yourself to recognize them.

Why should people follow you? You need a strong sense of self to lead others, so consider how you assess problems and find solutions. Look at occasions you have mobilized yourself and your team to tackle a tough assignment. Perhaps you took on a failing project and turned it into a winner. You also may have found ways to reduce costs and improve efficiencies when others said it was impossible. In these instances, and in others you can remember, you have given people a reason to believe in your ability to get things done.

What have you done to earn the trust of others? This question should provoke a recall of what you have done to instill followership. You may have defused a conflict between two colleagues, or took the lead on a nasty assignment that no one else wanted to handle. Or maybe you went out of your way to see that senior management recognized the efforts of your team. Likely you are known as one who holds herself accountable.⁵



Consider what has enabled you to achieve what you have accomplished to date. When it comes to finding sources of accomplishment, you want to focus on the positives, your moments of triumph—those opportunities where you shone, helping yourself and your team achieve a goal.

10. | Project Confidence

SELF-CONFIDENCE RESTS ON THREE ATTRIBUTES:

Realism. Confident leaders are those who can look reality square in the face and not flinch. They possess an inner strength that enables them to size up adversity and remain true to purpose.

Reassurance. Leaders need to share their sense of confidence with their people. That does not mean that leaders must say everything is rosy. Reassurance emerges from addressing reality but also talking about what is going right and what individuals can do to improve a situation.

Resolve. The strength to persevere is a form of confidence. It does not mean that you have all the answers; in fact you may not have any, but you do know that as a leader your job is to hold the organization together until the situation brightens.



Realism, reassurance, and resolve all inspire confidence, which is something leaders should try to project every day.
