



EXECUTIVE  SUMMARY  
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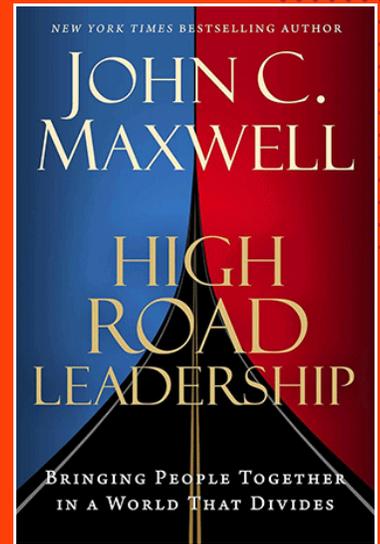
THE SUMMARY OF  
**HIGH ROAD LEADERSHIP**

John C. Maxwell  
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**Chapter One: Bring People Together**

What makes the difference between good and bad leaders? What causes the rise or fall of the leadership that impacts people? Skills and values. Leadership *rises* when leaders possess good leadership skills and good values. It *falls* when leader's skills or values are poor. It may be obvious that leaders who lack good skills or values are incapable of helping people. What's less obvious is the impact on people when leaders don't possess good values. If the values and skills are both lacking, leaders drag the people down with them. If their skills are good and their values bad, they manipulate people for their own benefit. As a leader, whenever you move people for your own advantage, it creates a win-lose situation, which is always wrong.

We need each other. If you're a leader and you allow yourself to get drawn into taking sides and working against other groups of people, you're limiting your leadership. Disagreement? Often. Disrespect? Never! As leaders, we all *need* the people on the other side. Our side doesn't have all the answers. Believing we do is



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arrogant. And those on the “other side” are not always wrong. And if you don’t listen to them, you’re shrinking your influence and limiting your impact. If you can’t work with people who disagree with you, you will never become the leader you could be.

You lose the *best* way when you must always have your *own* way. We can’t divide people and expect to accomplish positive results. Conversation and collaboration will always come up with better answers than isolation and exclusion.

I believe people choose one of three paths when they interact with others: the low road, the middle road, or the high road.

When we travel the middle road, we value fairness. We are open to give-and-take to keep things even. We are willing to compromise—as long as we’re getting at least as much as we’re giving, and we’d prefer that we get our share first. This kind of mindset is limiting because it is very transactional.

People on the low road think only of themselves. They look out for number one. Low-road leaders take from others and don’t even think about giving anything back. Why? Because they believe taking is the only way they can get what they want. I’ve also observed that more and more people who travel the low road think the world *owes* them. They see themselves as victims.

Whereas the middle and low roads are me-first, the high road is others-first. High-road people intentionally give first without worrying about receiving anything back. They aren’t trying to make their interactions fair, because they acknowledge that life is not fair. They want to keep the balance in the *other* person’s favor because they know it makes the world a better place. And they don’t worry about not getting their share because they believe there’s enough to go around for everyone.

I know of no better way to live and lead than on the high road.

1. The high road brings people together.
2. The high road brings out the best in people.
3. The high road creates winners without creating losers.
4. The high road has less traffic.
5. The high road is the path to significance.

There’s no telling what you might be able to accomplish if you travel the high road. But even if you don’t do all that you hope, you will live with fewer regrets. And the people you touch along the way will benefit greatly.

## Chapter Two: Value All People

Have you ever had a conversation that was no big deal to the person who gave you the advice, but it changed the trajectory of your life? I engaged in one of those the day I graduated from college, at dinner with parents, my siblings, and my fiancée, Margaret.

“Son,” my Dad said, “value people, believe in them, and love them unconditionally. Do those things every day, and you will be successful.”

Valuing people, believing in them, and loving them unconditionally became the framework for everything I did as I started my career. I wanted to empower people, build them up, and inspire them to grow and change. I emphasized what people *could do*, not what they *should not do*.

That’s not to say I was doing everything right. I was also driven by my own selfish desire to be liked. I was a people pleaser. When someone didn’t like me, I would do whatever was needed to win them over. But I had to learn that it was more important for me to love people than for them to love me if I was to

become a more effective leader. You can't effectively *lead* people if you *need* people.

If you want to become the best leader you can be, you need to learn how to lead people on the high road. How can you do that? Start by valuing all people.

Embrace the value of *all* people. That is the start of everything. If you don't accept and embrace the idea that all people have value and deserve to be treated with dignity, you will always struggle with your leadership. And it will be impossible for you to be a high-road leader.

While valuing all people comes from recognizing and embracing their worth, believing in people comes from seeing and acknowledging their potential. When you believe people can achieve, improve, be more than they are, and make a contribution to the world, you will value them and add value to them by investing in them.

1. Express your belief in them. Most people rise to the level of other's expectations for them.
2. Equip them. What's the greatest expression of belief in another person? Equipping them! Equipping is belief in action.
3. Challenge them. Nobody has to hit the lid of their capacity. Each of us can keep growing as long as we live.

Extend unconditional love to all people. Most people are capable of loving. The greater challenge is loving unconditionally. (If the word *love* seems too challenging, think of it as unconditional acceptance.) Unconditional love is a gift, a gift that not everybody knows they need—until they receive it. If you can commit yourself to loving people unconditionally as a leader, you create an atmosphere like no other.

You may be thinking that this all sounds very idealistic. I agree that it is. But that doesn't mean it isn't worth striving for. If you desire to value all people and become the best leader you can be on the high road, then follow these steps.

1. Develop humble appreciation for yourself. Don't think too much of yourself or *about* yourself too much.
2. Choose to start putting your focus on others.
3. Take action. A change in behavior helps to create a change in heart.
4. Allow your heart for people to grow.
5. Enjoy the positive return. High-road leaders don't value people to get a reward—that's not the right motivation. However, there is eventually a return for valuing others:
  - A Relational Return. You open doors to new relationships with every interaction.
  - An Emotional Return. Few things in life are more rewarding than helping another human being.
  - A Leadership Return. Your influence increases because people trust you and have a greater desire to work with you.

When you value all people, everybody wins. The ability to value all people by believing in them, caring about them, and unconditionally accepting and loving them comes from having the right perspective. The secret is how you see others. How we view things is how we do things.

## Chapter Three: Acknowledge Your Humanness

At lunch one day, my mentor looked at me and said, “John, a lot of people are telling you how amazing you are. But I need to tell you something: You’re not amazing. Your gift is amazing, but you are not. You’re one step from stupid.” He went on to explain to me that the gifts we have are always greater than the person. If our gifts are great, they don’t make us better than anybody else, nor does our possession of them excuse poor behavior. The best we can do is use whatever we have been given to benefit others.

What is my best advice to people for acknowledging their humanness without becoming discouraged or discounting their ability to lead others effectively? I recommend that you do five things:

### 1. See yourself.

The most important step in acknowledging your humanness is developing self-awareness. You have to know who you are. But beware of three common obstacles you may need to overcome.

- Experience. It’s hard to listen and learn when you think you already know everything.
- Power. Studies show the more power a leader holds, the more likely they are to overestimate their skills and abilities.
- Pride. If we possess too much pride and are trying to feed our egos, we are less likely to recognize our weaknesses and more likely to over-inflate our strengths.

### 2. Care for yourself.

What should you do when you receive all this negative information about yourself? Too many people

beat themselves up. Instead, care for yourself by practicing self-compassion. The most important voice in your life is your own.

### 3. Forgive yourself.

Measuring your weaknesses, failures, and struggles against an unrealistic standard can be profoundly discouraging. The solution is to let go of perfectionism and forgive yourself for not being perfect.

### 4. Laugh at yourself.

Few things do more to help a person live a healthier life, build connections with others, and improve their leadership than the ability to get over yourself and laugh at your imperfections.

### 5. Believe in yourself.

If you are able to acknowledge your humanness and develop confident humility, you will place yourself in a position to be a high-road leader who treats people well and accomplishes much.

High-road leaders are aware of their humanness. When you’re aware of your humanness and you acknowledge you don’t know all the answers, you listen to yourself and others. You better understand yourself and others. You develop empathy for yourself and others and care for them. And you are better able to lead yourself and others on the high road. None of us wants to be judged by our worst days. We desire grace and acceptance, and we can learn to give it.

## Chapter Four: Do the Right Thing for the Right Reasons

Motives always matter. The most important question leaders can ask themselves is: *Why do I want to lead others?* In other words, what are my motives? What

are my reasons for doing what I do? Are they open or hidden? Am I doing it because I have a personal agenda or desire personal gain? Or am I doing it for the benefit of others?

Leaders who don't do the right thing need to check their motives. Some leaders purposely devalue people, divide them, and exploit them because their motives are selfish. Others are unaware that they are harming people through their actions because their motives are driven by pain, emptiness, insecurity, or some other internal cause. They may have no idea that what they're doing isn't right.

What's *right*? you may ask. It's doing what benefits the majority of the people. It's wanting what's best for yourself *and* others. It's following the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That's the standard, but it's hard to live by. I know I have to check my own motives frequently so I don't drift off course into low-road leadership. Anytime I'm trying to move others solely for my own benefit, I'm off course. Anything that's not serving others at least as much as it's serving me is manipulation.

The right values can help you stop making wrong choices. I want to encourage you to reject some actions that will undermine your leadership.

- Stop chasing what's easy.
- Stop chasing applause.
- Stop insisting you're right.
- Stop paying lip service.
- Stop placing blame on others.

I wish I could tell you that doing the right things for the right reasons doesn't cost anything. Doing what's right often has a price. But as you strive to take the high road, you need to start paying the price to stay on the high road. The first time you pay is the hardest. The next time will still be hard, but since you've

done it before, you'll know you can do it again. I've also learned you may not always know the full cost on the front end, and that your account is never "Paid in Full." Paying a price is a never-ending process.

Doing the right thing can cost you time, money, friendships, and opportunities. But what's the cost of *not* doing the right thing? Loss of self-respect. Harm to other people. Guilt. Regret. Damage to your heart and soul. Don't pay that cost. Do the right things and live on the high road. The value of doing what's right outweighs the costs. You may lose ground, but you'll gain growth. You may lose power, but you will gain strength. You may lose money, but you will gain wealth. You may lose celebrity, but you will gain credibility.

If you want to be a high-road leader, every time you prepare to make a decision or take action, check your motives. Ask yourself why you're doing what you're doing. Whom are you trying to serve? If you try to do the right things for the right reasons every time, you'll always be able to live with yourself, people will trust you, and you'll have an ongoing positive influence with others.

## Chapter Five: Give More Than You Take

Giving as a high-road leader has nothing to do with wealth. The question is much simpler: Every day of your life, are you *giving* more than you *take*? As a result, they intentionally adopt and maintain a generosity of spirit.

- Open-Hearted Generosity: I desire to add value to others.
- Open-Minded Generosity: I think the best of others.
- Open-Handed Generosity: I give freely and often to others.

I know plenty of successful people who are unhappy, but I have never met a generous person who was unhappy. How can you add value to people? What do you have to give that will help others, bless them, show them they matter, and help them get ahead? As a high-road leader we can give of our talent, our time, our opportunities, our experiences, our connections, and our money.

Of course, you can't give what you don't have. My realization about the importance of growth came to me over time, starting in my twenties.

1. I needed to grow. If I was not intentional about growing, I would not improve personally or professionally.
2. I needed to target my growth. I began choosing and reading books every month that I believed would help me improve myself.
3. I needed to apply and practice what I'd been learning.
4. I needed to share what I've been learning to help others. As others began asking me for advice, I began teaching them the insights I'd gained from my personal growth journey.
5. I needed to continue growing for the sake of others. I'm no longer motivated by success. Now I'm motivated by significance through giving. The more I learn, the more I have to return to others. My hope is to keep giving until I'm empty. And I don't believe that will happen anytime soon.

Everyone has something to give, so don't wait to start giving more than you take. Start today. Be a river, not a reservoir. Start earning and learning to make yourself more valuable to others so you can start returning. And embrace a spirit of generosity. You'll never regret it.

## Chapter Six: Develop Emotional Capacity

Emotional capacity is the ability to respond to adversity, failure, criticism, and pressure in positive ways. If we're drowning, we can't save other people who are drowning. If we're locked up emotionally, we will find it difficult or impossible to take the high road because leadership requires high emotional capacity. Here are eight ways to reduce unneeded stress, develop emotional capacity, and increase the ability to work under pressure.

### 1. Refuse to see yourself as a victim.

Take responsibility for your life.

- Attitude—I recognize that my attitude is a choice and I work at keeping it positive every day.
- Time—I have only a set number of hours in a day and I control how I use them. I don't allow others to dictate my schedule.
- Priorities—I identify and work to act on the most important things every day and not let lesser things to distract me.
- Potential—I am responsible for my own personal growth and maximizing my potential. If I don't develop it, no one else will.
- Passion—I don't wait for others to inspire and motivate me.
- Calling—I am responsible for the gifts and opportunities God gives me, and I work to make the most of them.

To prevent feeling like a victim, don't build your life around your troubles, make taking action your priority, and express gratitude. If you see yourself as a victim, you give your power away.

## 2. Learn to control your emotions and process them quickly.

You can't let your emotions overwhelm you.

- I review my day by myself—I ask, *What happened in my world today?*
- I think about myself—I ask, *What did I learn about myself today?*
- I talk to myself—since 95% of our emotions are determined by the way we talk to ourselves, I ask *What do I need to hear myself say?*
- I direct myself—I ask, *How should I apply what I've learned?*
- I take action myself—I ask, *Will I follow through with action?*

## 3. Keep short accounts.

I refuse to carry around negative emotions toward other people.

Anger, resentment, jealousy, envy, bitterness, grudges—these things weigh us down. Meanwhile, the target of our negative emotions is out dancing. If I'm in the wrong, I apologize immediately and try to make amends. If the other person is in the wrong, I make the intentional choice to forgive them. And then I move on. I have places to go and important tasks to accomplish.

## 4. Put other people's opinions in perspective.

Early in my pastoral ministry I made the decision to stop being a people-pleaser and to start being a principle leader.

- I placed my values ahead of the people I wanted to please.
- I thought more about looking forward than looking backward.
- I found new models to emulate.
- I moved away from people who were holding me back.

## 5. Understand the difference between a problem and a fact of life.

The fastest way to increase your emotional capacity and reduce your stress is to keep yourself from getting caught up in issues you cannot control or which aren't your concern. For something to be labeled a problem it has to be solvable. You must be able to do something about it.

## 6. Become comfortable with discomfort.

Developing emotional capacity does not mean always playing it safe or staying in your comfort zone. That's avoidance. All progress requires change. Great progress involves risk.

## 7. Keep growing your capacity so it's always greater than your responsibilities.

When our responsibilities are greater than our capacity, we experience burnout. When our responsibilities are equal to our capacity, we experience chronic

stress. When our responsibilities are less than our capacity, we experience sustainable success.

Healthy ways to manage your responsibilities and proactive ways to increase your capacity include:

- Establishing better boundaries.
- Counting the cost of your commitments
- Aligning your responsibilities with your purpose
- Focusing on your strengths
- Managing your energy every day

## 8. Make caring for yourself a priority.

One of the best things you can do to increase your emotional capacity is to take care of yourself. To be at my best, I focus on caring for myself in four areas.

- Seeking spiritual nourishment. Every day I ask God for guidance.
- Receiving relational energy. I spend time with people I love. I invest time in people who value growth.
- Maintaining physical health. I swim for thirty minutes a day.
- Promoting mental growth. I fill my mind with good thoughts and ideas.

The essence of high-road leadership is serving people and giving your best to them. That's possible only if you have something to give and you possess the capacity to give it. The less emotional baggage you carry, the further you will be able to go. The more you focus on what really matters and let other things go, the less distracted you will be from your greater purpose. The more you work on your emotional capacity, the more margin you will have and the more resilient you will be. All of these things will put you in

a better place to lead for the sake of others, no matter what life throws at you.

## Chapter Seven: Place People Above Your Own Agenda

Good leaders get things done. They have a bias toward action so they can accomplish things. They always have an agenda. That can be a great thing. But it can also be terrible if the leaders place their agenda ahead of people. At what point does an agenda, a vision, or a cause become more important than people? My answer is *never*. People are always of the highest value. Low-road leaders put others “in their place” by elevating themselves above everyone else. High-road leaders know the right “place” for others is above them.

How we see people is how we treat people. If I see you as anything less than valuable, I won't serve you. And if I won't serve you, I'll put my agenda ahead of your best interests. Does placing people first mean you have to give up trying to accomplish your vision? No, of course not. High-road leaders understand that nothing they want to accomplish is possible unless the people they lead are successful.

### 1. Develop empathy intentionally.

We must learn to listen to others and work to understand them better. When our hearts are softened, our minds are opened. When our minds are open, we are less likely to dismiss or overpower them to get our way.

### 2. Make time for people daily.

It's important to have a heart for people, to care about them and value them. But it's also crucial to put that caring into action. The way to do that is to be intentional about making time for people every day.

### 3. Check your agenda repeatedly.

When leaders put their agenda ahead of people, they can take their entire organization off course and create lasting damage to people. It's important for us to check our motives and our way of interacting with people every day. This reminds us of our priorities.

### 4. Create win-win outcomes continually.

If you don't work to create a win-win outcome, you'll almost always end up with a win-lose. Or worse, you may have to live with a lose-lose. When you win at another person's expense, you're not only practicing low-road leadership; you're also engaged in short-term thinking. That inevitably prevents long-term success.

Leading people is never static. You must continually change the way you lead to fit the people and situations, which are constantly shifting. I call this the *leadership dance*—as the leader, you give people respect while accomplishing your goals.

*Sometimes You're Ahead: Lead by Example.* At times the best thing you can do for your people is lead them from the front. You break ground so they can follow you. But if you try to lead from too far ahead, the people get lost.

*Sometimes You're Beside: Ask Questions and Listen.* When I finally understood that I couldn't lead everyone the same way, the first new skill I worked to develop was listening. That was difficult for me because I'm a talker and a doer.

*Sometimes You're Below: Serve Your People.* One of the best things you can do for the people you lead is to serve them. It communicates to them their importance to you. Some of the ways a leader can serve people is by removing obstacles no one else can, by providing the resources they need, and by lifting

burdens off them that prevent them from being and doing their best.

*Sometimes You're Behind: Support Your People.* Few things are more encouraging for people than being backed up by their leaders. Sometimes this will involve pulling them forward, pushing them forward, or patiently waiting for them to move forward.

*Sometimes You're Above: Advance the Bible Picture.* Leaders always carry the responsibility for seeing the big picture, communicating the vision, and putting people and resources in the right places for everyone to experience success. They are pushing an agenda, but it's not a personal agenda—they're advancing a common agenda for the benefit of everyone.

In the end, the best way to accomplish your agenda is to place people above it. That may feel counterintuitive, but it's true. If you serve the people you lead, they will serve you. It's like a circle being completed. It's the Golden Rule coming to fruition.

## Chapter Eight: Embrace Authenticity

If you desire to become an effective leader who takes the high road, then you must embrace authenticity. You can't hide. You can't pretend to become something you're not. You can't try to trick people into believing you are a better person or leader than you really are. You must be yourself with them, being open about your flaws and shortcomings as well as your strengths.

Once a C-suite leader challenged my thinking on this. He believed a leader should never show weakness to employees. "You're working under a misconception," I explained. "You think your people don't already know your weaknesses and flaws. The purpose of admitting

them isn't to give them new information. It's to let them know that *you* know what they are.

If you desire to embrace authenticity and become more open, here are six things you can do that will help you:

### 1. Embrace and live good values.

It's much easier to be open with others when you're not trying to hide anything. People who say they believe in good values yet secretly live by a different set of values can't afford to be authentic because people will see the disparity, label them as hypocrites, and disrespect them.

### 2. Embrace the idea of living *between* success and failure.

As leaders, we get in trouble if we internally label ourselves as *successful* because we may go into denial when we're performing poorly. We try to cover up the evidence that contradicts our successful image.

### 3. Embrace the value of character over reputation.

Reputation has no substance. What really matters is character because that determines who you are, how you interact with people, and what you're capable of accomplishing. When your character exceeds your reputation, you can travel the high road even when it's difficult because your values and internal fortitude support you.

### 4. Embrace the choices you make over the gifts you've been given.

We have no control over our gifts. We have received what we have been given. We can't take credit for them. Talent is overrated.

### 5. Embrace the value of your contribution.

High-road leaders work at being self-aware and are able to realistically evaluate the contribution they make. They don't overinflate the value of what they do to stroke their own egos. They don't undervalue their work because of insecurity. And they don't allow others to dictate what contribution they should make. You may not be valuing your contribution appropriately if you often seek validation from others, if you often compare yourself to others, or if you assume your contribution isn't enough.

### 6. Embrace honesty when you're wrong or make mistakes.

People always respect leaders who openly admit when they are wrong and work to make things right.

When leaders look back on bad decisions, some rationalize what they've done. Some lie to themselves and others. Some fight. But if you're willing to be vulnerable, accept your mistakes and failures with grace, and learn from them, then you can move forward. And your team will come with you. People respect authentic leaders who take the high road. If you do anything other than embrace authenticity, people won't forgive.

## Chapter Nine: Take Accountability for Your Actions

I suggest we *take* accountability, not *be accountable*. Why? Because this process is not passive. Accountability is active and intentional. If you want to be a high-road leader, you can't pick and choose when you take accountability. To be considered accountable, you must demonstrate responsibility and ownership of your actions consistently, yet imperfectly. Accountability isn't a one-time occurrence. It's ongoing, so you are either accountable or

you aren't. You need to become comfortable with the discomfort of being wrong and owning it.

Accountability and responsibility work together. Middle- and low-road leaders see their leadership position or authority as a benefit. They like the freedom of being in control, making decisions, and going to the front of the line. High-road leaders look at leadership as a responsibility. Responsibility is *in the present*. Accountability is *after the fact*.

**Personal Responsibility.** High-road leaders are first accountable to themselves. When you accept responsibility for yourself, your problems, and your failures, you will be determined to find a way forward anytime you want to accomplish something.

**Team Responsibility.** Anytime you are a member of a team, you have responsibilities to your teammates. If your teammates can't depend on you *all* the time, then they really can't depend on you *any* of the time. And that weakens the team.

**Leadership Responsibility.** If you want to lead a team effectively and remain on the high road, you must take responsibility for the team's performance. The best way to do that is to focus on helping every member of the team reach their potential and work together to win.

- Accountability builds your credibility. You cannot rest on your laurels when it comes to credibility. You must earn it and re-earn it every day. Your behavior today is the latest deposit in your credibility.
- Accountability keeps you consistent. I've observed that long-term consistency is more powerful than short-term intensity. That's because consistency compounds.

- Accountability increases your self-respect. When you make good choices and follow through on your commitments because you hold yourself accountable, the feeling that follows is self-respect. Your sense of self-respect will make you feel more self-confident. That in turn helps you make better choices uninhibited by guilt or doubt. It creates a positive cycle for you and makes a positive impact on others.
- Everyone needs to be accountable to someone. Without accountability, we all tend to go off track and find ourselves on the low road of life. "If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month" (Theodore Roosevelt).
- Saying *No* to accountability means saying *No* to the high road. Leaders who don't take responsibility for their actions never gain the trust of their people, and because leadership is influence, it always functions on the basis of trust.

Everyone deserves to be led well. Not only is this the motto of our Maxwell Leadership companies, but this is a truth that is universal. Everywhere I travel and speak, people *desire* good leadership, and they *deserve* good leadership. How can we get the leadership we need and deserve? By holding ourselves and others accountable. If each of us would take accountability for our own actions, and we would require the people who lead us to do the same, the world would be transformed. Let's all take steps in that direction and see what happens.

## Chapter Ten: Live by the Bigger Picture

Have you ever wondered what all great leaders have in common? I have. In fact, I have spent more than a half century studying leadership and observing

leaders, and I believe I have the answer. The distinctive ability of leaders is that they see more than others and they see it before others. They possess a different perspective. They see the bigger picture, and they do so more quickly than others.

I call this ability in leaders to see more and before the “leadership advantage.” They have a perspective that others don’t have. It’s like a superpower, and like any superpower, it can be used for good or ill. When you live by the bigger picture, you increase your ability to make a difference in the lives of others.

How can we develop the ability to see the bigger picture so that we can use it to help others on the high road? How do we sharpen and increase it?

We must develop maturity. If we can be humble enough to understand the world is not about us, perceptive enough to recognize what’s important, and patient enough to wait and play the long game for the best outcomes, we have the potential to live by the bigger picture.

Another ability that helps a leader live by the bigger picture is seeing things within context. This leader sees more and sees it before others.

- *Informational context.* You begin with facts, objectives, expectations
- *Historical context.* Knowing what happened in the past is invaluable.
- *Situational context.* What is happening and changing now?
- *Motivational context.* You need to know both the what and the why.
- *Collaborative context.* Two of my great desires are connection and learning.

- *Experiential context.* Your experience has value, but don’t let it limit you.
- *Tactical context.* Good leaders have a plan, but adjust their tactics to the changing situation.

The best place to see the bigger picture is from a platform of success and significance. If you become highly intentional about seeing and living the bigger picture, and you do the inner character work to become the best person and leader you can be, you will be able to achieve that perspective. And when you become bigger on the inside than on the outside, that will give you greater opportunities to lead others to success and significance yourself.

Living by the bigger picture is seeing the world as it is, finding opportunities to help others become great, using your skills, talents, and resources to create an environment that brings out the best in people, and helping as many people as you can in the time that you have. If you’re mature enough to focus on others and take the long view of making a difference, if you are willing to broaden your view so that you see every person and situation in their context, and if you become highly intentional in seeing how you can add value to people, you will be able to live by the bigger picture.

## Chapter Eleven: Don’t Keep Score

When I announced my resignation as a twenty-five-year-old pastor from my first church, a close friend of ours approached me, weeping. “How could you leave us after all I’ve done for you?”

His words cut deeply into my heart. I decided I would never let that happen to me again. I would not allow another person’s scorekeeping to limit my purpose or my leadership. For the next twenty-two years while I led churches as a pastor, I never allowed anyone to buy my meal. If I went to lunch or dinner with

anyone, I paid. If I couldn't afford to pay, I didn't go. I wanted to put myself in a position where I was giving rather than taking so I could lead without guilt or obligation. I was determined to take the high road as a leader.

Keeping score will always lead you to the middle or the low road. Avoid the temptation to keep the score "even" with others or to keep yourself ahead for the wrong reasons. Keeping score may appear to be a way not to get behind in life. Or it may look like a way to get ahead in leadership. But the reality is that the practice drags us and others down. Here are six ways I've seen scorekeeping hurt people:

1. Keeping score puts guilt on others.
2. Keeping score creates feelings of unfairness.
3. Keeping score becomes an act of control.
4. Keeping score removes gratitude by poisoning attitude.
5. Keeping score increases emotional baggage too heavy to carry.
6. Keeping score breeds entitlement.

High-road leaders keep track without keeping score. My greatest leadership challenge every day is leading myself. Keeping track helps me do that. Keeping track is about my behavior, making certain I do the right things for the right reasons. Keeping score is about the manipulation of your life, controlling you, fostering guilt, creating unhealthy comparisons, increasing emotional baggage, and prompting feelings of unfairness. I like to think of keeping track as *give and forget*.

High-road leaders make the choice to forgive others without placing conditions on them because it not only releases the other person from any harm they have caused, but because it also releases the forgiver.

Forgiveness is not about keeping score; it's about losing count.

The Golden Rule calls us to treat others as you would like to be treated. High-road leaders follow the Platinum Rule: treat others *better* than they treat us. It means not keeping a record of wrongs done to us, retaliating, or holding grudges. It means being kind to others, even if they are unkind or indifferent to us.

The greatest experience of my life, you may be surprised to learn, was December 18, 1998, the night I had a heart attack. At the hospital, I asked the doctors to level with me.

"If nothing changes and we can't get the heart attack to stop," they told me, "then yes, you probably will die."

In that hour of uncertainty, when they brought my kids in to say goodbye to me, and I got to tell them and Margaret how much I loved them, I felt a great calm. First, I found out I wasn't afraid to die. I experienced a peace only God can give. And second, I had a moment when I wondered if there was somebody I needed to call to ask their forgiveness. Or anyone I needed to forgive that I hadn't. I couldn't think of anybody. As far as I could tell, my slate was clean because I kept short accounts, asked forgiveness when I'd done wrong, forgave without conditions, and hadn't kept score.

That's what I hope for you. I hope you can travel the high road and keep your slate clean by not keeping score. And I don't want you to have to face a near-death experience to give you perspective.

## Chapter Twelve: Desire the Best for Others

My early philosophy of leadership was symbolized by a saying I quoted a lot: "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you

care.” And to this day, it still represents how I feel about leadership.

I believe high-road leaders always let their people know how much they care. The world needs more leaders who desire the best for others and take action to follow through with that desire.

Who will step up to the high road? The question is, How can you or I become a special person? How can we become more effective leaders on the high road? No matter how you measure leadership effectiveness—whether by the number of people helped, the extent to which they are helped, the organization’s impact, increased profit, or extended influence—the results come from elevating people and adding value to them because you want the best for them. People are what makes every one of these outcomes possible.

The way to bring out the best in others is to first *desire* the best for others. This requires a shift in the way you think, the words you use, and the actions you take. Here’s how this works:

### 1. Change your thinking.

Everything begins with a thought. Low-road leaders desire the best for themselves. Middle-road leaders desire what’s fair. High-road leaders desire the best for others. High-road leaders are rare, and one of the reasons is that they desire the best for others. To be a leader who *does* these things, you must become a person who *thinks* this way.

### 2. Change your words.

When you give your changed thinking expression, it does three things for you. First, it cements the ideas and makes them more established in your thinking. The more you articulate something you believe, the

stronger it becomes. Second, it starts to create the shift from idea to action. And third, it begins to positively impact people. Words have power.

### 3. Change your actions.

The ultimate goal of desiring the best for others is to actually help them be their best. Here are five specific ways to align your words and actions to be this kind of high-road leader:

1. *“I Value You”—Affirming Words and Actions.* Speak affirming words to others, and you will see them respond positively.
2. *“I Believe in You”—Encouraging Words and Actions.* If you will look for the best in others, tell them you believe in them, and then follow through by supporting them with further encouragement, you will be amazed by how most people rise to meet your positive expectations.
3. *“I Need You”—Empowering Words and Actions.* If you’ll let people know how much you need them, they will help you and you will be able to share success and significance with them.
4. *“I Want More for You Than from You”—Expanding Words and Actions.* High-road leaders take steps to deliver more to others than from them.
5. *“I Will Help You”—Serving with Words and Actions.* As a high-road leader, you should be thinking continually how you can serve the people in your life. What kind of help can you give them that shows you desire the best for them?
6. *“I Will Do What You Cannot Do for Yourself”—Enlarging with Words and Actions.* So many people did things for me that I could not do for myself early in my career. This practice is per-



haps the favorite thing I get to do with others because it helps enlarge them. What can you offer people that they would not have access to any other way? Who do you know that they should know?

The future belongs to you. I hope and pray you will take the high road and use your leadership to make

your family, organization, community, and nation better. High-road leaders put others ahead of themselves. They live for the good of others. Desiring the best for others will always bring out the best in you! It is the only way we will be able to bring people together in a world that divides.

