JOHN C. MAXWELL

UNPLUGGED

17 QUESTIONS
MOST ASKED OF
JOHN MAXWELL’S
LEADERSHIP
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Welcome to John C. Maxwell Unplugged!

Thank you for your desire to grow personally as a leader. John Maxwell asserts that “personal and organizational effectiveness is proportionate to the strength of leadership.” To become more effective, each of us must grow in leadership. Our own growth helps others to follow suit.

As you follow along with John’s teaching on some of his most frequently asked leadership questions, this companion workbook enables you to take notes and challenge yourself with questions to reflect upon and actions to take. You may want to share your answers and insights with a mentor or friend.

The DVDs are designed so that you may either watch John’s teaching in order, or dig straight in to the topics of most interest to you and then skip around. Set aside some time each week to watch John answer one leadership question and then to reflect on this workbook’s follow-up questions. Or move at a quicker pace and tackle one of the 15 teaching topics each day to complete the DVDs in just two weeks!
Question
How do you move people into your inner circle? What are the pros and cons of having one?

John’s Answer
Those who are closest to us determine our success. John teaches this in The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership – The Law of the Inner Circle. Every person on your team and in your inner circle is either a blessing or a curse. In the same way, each person carries two buckets – gasoline and water. When there’s a fire, everyone uses one or the other. Your inner circle will get to a fire before you, since the higher you are in an organization, the later you are on the scene. Positive, well-trained people are going to help you.

5 Ways to Move into John’s Inner Circle

Time: It takes time to get into the inner circle. It takes time to develop the relationship, even if the person is positioned close to you, like a new executive hire.

Trust: You must totally trust your inner circle. You should not have to question their motives.

Experience: They must have experience under their belt already. In John’s case, he doesn’t want someone too young.

Success: They need to have had some success. This isn’t their chance to “make it”; they need to have already made it. They need to already be consistently good.

Compatibility: Life is too short to have people in your inner circle that you don’t like. You need to like the people in your inner circle.

Reflect and Take Action

• How do you work with your inner circle?
• What criteria do you have for them?
• What can you do to increase the time and trust you have with your inner circle?
• What successes have you experienced and/or failures have you weathered with this group?
• If you do not have an inner circle, create one. Make a list of 3-5 people you’d like to intentionally include and the experience, skills, and strengths they have that complement yours.
• If you have an inner circle, list the members and write a plus or a minus next to each name along with a number from 1 to 10 to indicate how strongly they impact you, either positively or negatively. Then, list the ways you will intentionally build trust and relationship with each one individually.
Personal Growth

Question
How can you help people who take more time planning their weekend than their personal growth? What are the key components of a practical leadership development plan?

John’s Answer
Think about urgency and priority. The people you’re talking about don’t have a sense of urgency about their purpose. They think there is more to having fun than there is in being fulfilled. To help someone create a personal growth plan for the first time, keep things simple.

A personal growth plan needs to address three areas.
Requirement: You must do what you must do.

Reward: Where you get your reward is where you spend your energy planning.

Return: Life’s return is not in the weekend. It’s in Monday through Friday. Look for a compounding return.

Reflect and Take Action
- Do you have a personal growth plan?
- If so, evaluate your plan as it relates to the three areas of requirement, reward and return. If your plan does not address one of these issues, take time to add that component to your growth this year.
- Share your personal development plan with someone from your inner circle.
- If you don’t yet have a personal growth plan, what urgency or priority needs to change for you to create one and stick with it?
Development Plans

Question
How do you judge the success of a development plan? How often should you reevaluate your development plan?

John’s Answer
The success of a development plan is the return. Production. Too many people work every day and never see the return, and it wears them out.

John evaluates his personal growth plan every three months, by each season. The last week of the year is JM’s favorite. He reviews his year.

Reflect and Take Action
- If you do not have a personal growth plan, create one using the chart below. Include daily, weekly and monthly growth opportunities as well as some key experiences or events throughout the year. Include content from a variety of media to fit your learning style (books, audio, video, in-person).
- If you already have a development plan, take time now to reevaluate your plan’s effectiveness. What results have you seen from your plan?
- If you have had a personal development plan for some time, how often do you typically evaluate it? What changes have you made as a result of these reevaluations?
- Commit to reevaluate your plan regularly. When and how will you sit down with your plan to review both the plan and your return?
Leadership without a Title

Question
Is it possible to be a leader if you have no staff or organization?

John’s Answer
Yes, it is possible. Leadership is influence. Everyone can influence somebody — your family, your neighbors, even the people at the gym. Many of the great leaders of the last century did not have a leadership position, like Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King, Jr. You never have to have a title to be a leader. John wrote *The 360 Degree Leader* for people in this situation.

Who could be greater to lead than your children? That’s the best gift we can give to the next generation.

So to become a better leader, increase your influence. Deepen your influence with one, and broaden your influence with many.

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Creative Thinking

Question
How do I foster creative thinking in a structured organization?

John’s Answer
Whenever you want to get people to do something they’re not used to doing, remember this — what gets rewarded gets done. That doesn’t only mean financial. First, give recognition, and do it in front of people who are important to the person you’re recognizing. That’s where the highest return is.

Also, people do what people see.

Nothing is more demoralizing than a leader who doesn’t listen. If the leader isn’t listening, the people have nothing to say. So walk slowly through the crowd. Good leaders listen, learn, and then lead. All their cues are from listening. Leaders don’t stay on the mountain and say, “Come to me.” If you’re at the top all alone, you’re not a leader; you’re a hiker. Leading people slows you down.

Reflect and Take Action
- What is the biggest barrier to creative thinking in your organization?
- Is there enough margin in your organization’s finances, timelines, communication, etc. to not just allow, but promote creative thinking?
- How does your organization reward creative thinking?
- Failure is a natural part of the creative process. How does your organization react to failure?
- Implement a time of creative thinking about a particular challenge or big goal inside your organization. Try changing your routine or environment; a fresh perspective can inspire fresh creativity and new solutions.
- This can also work with a group. Don’t be afraid to add silly toys, props, candy, party hats or crayons — anything to shock the system and inspire your brains to be creative. Finally, ban the word “No” during these sessions and substitute it with “Yes, and....”
Restlessness

Question
How do you know when it’s time to transition or to plan during times when we feel restless?

John’s Answer
There are two kinds of restlessness: good and bad. The first job is to distinguish which kind you’re experiencing. It’s good when it’s pulling you toward improvement. That kind is healthy. For example, every major growth decision that John has made grew out of restlessness. The restlessness is bad when you’re bored or unhappy. In those cases, you are leaving a situation to escape it. In the case of good restlessness, you leave to do something better.

Good restlessness has patience. Bad has impatience. In good restlessness, you’re willing to hold steady. When you escape with no place to go, you often end up worse than where you were. Change isn’t always good.

Good restlessness comes from wanting to grow more because the current potential is tapped. Don’t move anywhere else until you’ve done your best where you are. Bad restlessness comes when you haven’t paid the price to do your best. Don’t just move to make it easier on yourself.

Everything is a tradeoff. Everywhere you leave, you leave some good things. The more successful you are, the harder it is to make tradeoffs. That’s why some people become successful and then become flat. Be willing to give up income for potential, for opportunity.

If it’s the good kind of restlessness, it’s patient and mature. It’s willing to hold on and be patient today so that it can take off tomorrow. In that period, you study, pray, reflect, plan, write, interview people ahead of you, etc.

Reflect and Take Action
- Describe good restlessness and bad restlessness in your own words. Does your own history hold examples of either or both?
- Are you patient and doing the best you can where you are right now? How do you know?
- What good things would you leave behind if you left where you are right now?
- What is the reward associated with the risk of leaving?
- What risk or decision do you need to take, whether it’s in your personal or professional life?
- Seek wise counsel about your career from your inner circle and/or a professional who is ahead of you.
Momentum

Question
What are key ways to build momentum in a business or on a team?

John’s Answer
The difference between successful and unsuccessful people is that successful people know how to make it happen. Unsuccessful people don’t.

Which comes first: momentum or productivity? Either. But if you have momentum without results, the momentum will eventually die. If you can produce, you will always have high momentum. Likewise, when you’re winning, nothing hurts. When you’re losing, everything hurts.

There are four steps to building momentum.

1. Set the Example. To create momentum on the team, the leader must have it. It’s not a team thing; it’s an individual thing. Motivation, momentum, and morale are a personal decision. By the way, hire motivated people.

2. Don’t Keep People Who Won’t Change.

3. Make Attitude as Importance as Competence.

4. Start Winning. Give people wins. Increase people’s confidence. When you’re about to close a deal, bring in someone who needs a win and let that person have it, giving up the credit.

Reflect and Take Action
- What example are you setting for those you influence? Are you promoting or stifling momentum?
- Momentum requires both activators and achievers. Which one are you? Who around you can help launch and complete big projects and build momentum?
- How does one person’s negative attitude affect a team’s morale and momentum?
- Do you prefer a competent teammate or a positive one? How does this preference affect your leadership?
- List upcoming wins you and your team are about to achieve. Next to each win, write the story of how the team has worked to achieve the goal. Set aside time in an upcoming meeting to share those stories of inspiration and excitement. Be sure to include those who need a win.
Draining People

Question
How do you handle people who drain you?

John’s Answer
People without energy will plug into you. They will not unplug. You feel like you need to give them energy from your battery until their battery is recharged. But they have no battery!

As you mature as a leader, you realize that you cannot make all people happy all the time.

That is the price of leadership. If you can’t get away from people, you have to find a way to find release from them. John does it by playing golf.

You also have to be honest with them. You need to have a private conversation to let them know they are draining you. Most people who drain others don’t know they do it.

Ninety percent of the problems with leadership come from people. But that’s what leaders are paid for.

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Servant Leadership

Question
Is servant leadership a different kind of leadership? Or is it just exceptional leadership?

John’s Answer
Jesus would say, “Leadership is servanthood. If you want to lead, serve.” Servant leadership should be a way of life for all of us. The essence of servant leadership is valuing people and adding value to their lives. If you value people, you want to serve. If you devalue people, you want to be served. Maturity is the ability to think of others first.

When I revised The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, I added the Law of Servanthood. I missed it the first time around. I grew after writing it. The downside of writing a book — it doesn’t change. So I’m grateful that I got to revisit the book. And I’m grateful that I could see growth since the first edition. If what you did five years ago still makes you excited, you’re not growing.

Reflect and Take Action
• John says that a good leader is always following someone and that he will not follow any leader who is not serving someone else. Who do you follow? If no one, intentionally choose 1 or 2 individuals that you can follow, and thereby serve, in some capacity.

• What unwritten rules of your leadership do you need to challenge as you grow and develop? John had the opportunity to revise The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. Is there a policy, precedent or practice in your business or team that could be challenged and revised?

• In your own life, who models servant leadership? How does that leader value people? Write down specific examples of servant leadership that you can follow.
Influence vs. Manipulation

Question
What is the difference between influence and manipulation?

John’s Answer
Motivation is when I move you for mutual advantage. We both win. That’s what leaders should do. If you’re not moving people, you’re not leading them. Manipulation is when I move you for personal advantage, where I win and you lose.

When John meets with world leaders, if he can get a private moment, he asks, “When you’re done leading, will the people be better off or worse off?” The only value of a leader is to lift people. If the leader wins and the people don’t, a leader hasn’t done his job correctly.

When followers follow a leader, they ask three questions.
1. Do you care for me? — Why would you follow someone who doesn’t care for you? You know you’re going to be manipulated.
2. Can you help me? — That’s competence.

Reflect and Take Action
• How do you motivate others? Do you consider how everyone can win?

• Evaluate your own motives for motivating others. Review these key questions. It’s a personal honesty test, so answer truthfully.
  - Do I only motivate people who can help me?
  - Do I only motivate people when I am in a leadership assignment?
  - Do I motivate others using leverage or guilt?
  - Do I unconditionally love others if they do not respond to my motivation?

• John says that you can’t motivate people positively that you feel negative about. Is there someone on your team or in your business who lacks motivation? Consider how you feel about that person. Write down what attitudes and behaviors you can change toward that person that will allow you to motivate him or her more positively.
Transparency

Question
How important is transparency in leadership?

John’s Answer
In previous generations, leaders used to say, “Don’t let people get too close to you.”

For example, in John’s first church, a congregation member, Arnold, took John and Margaret out to eat every week. And when John decided it was time to leave, Arnold said, “How could you leave us after all we’ve done for you?” After that conversation, John made a decision. John would always buy the meal, give generously and never keep score.

In John’s second church, John mentored a young man, poured into him, and the man messed up and John had to fire him. For the next year, John kept people at a distance. Then John realized that although people you keep at a distance will not hurt you, they also will not help you. So closeness and transparency are important to receiving help from others.

When you let people into your life, they see your humanness.

Relationships are the foundation for leadership. People won’t go along with you if they can’t get along with you. People don’t want a perfect leader; they want a loving leader.

People don’t care how much you know unless they know how much you care.

Reflect and Take Action
- Do you model motivation?
- From 1 to 10, how do you rate your transparency in leadership, with 1 being completely closed to personal relationships with your team and 10 being their best friend?
- John says good leadership from a distance will impress people, but the result of good leadership close-up is impact. Other-centered impact is an indicator of transparent leadership. Where is your impact? Who is benefiting, and who is not? Determine to develop transparent leadership in those areas where more impact is needed.
- To show people how much you care, use the 4 steps below for people with whom you would like increase your relationship, transparency and impact.
  - Remember their names.
  - Write down their quotes.
  - Tell others about their successes.
  - Ask for their help.
Global Leadership

Question
What can leaders do on a global scale to make big changes?

John’s Answer
The people in Washington can’t answer that question. Why? They put themselves first. They’re looking out for themselves. Why would anyone spend millions of dollars to get a job that pays $100,000 — unless they have an ego, are political in nature, and are going to look after themselves first.

What we need in America is a great crisis. We need all hell to break loose. If gas prices had gone to $9-10 a gallon, the pain level would be high enough for change. We all need enough pain to keep us humble, true, steady, and focused. When we don’t have it, we migrate back to selfishness. Think about how well people worked together immediately after the 9/11 attacks.

Big countries need big leaders, who think Gold Rule, and who put others before self. When it happens in their life, it changes the way they think and lead.

every day, John asks himself, “How can I add value to people today?” This sets the context of thinking for the day. Leave people better. At the end of every day, ask, “Who did I add value to today?” Do that and you’ll make your family, community, and country a better place to live.

Reflect and Take Action
- What global issue do you feel particularly drawn to and why?
- What are you doing in your sphere of influence to better the people affected by this issue?
- How do you implement the Gold Rule, putting others before yourself, in your leadership?
- How do you strive for significance and not selfishness each day?
- Think of a person who is tackling a global issue. Write down 5 attributes that make that person successful. How can you model those attitudes and behaviors to create positive change in your community?
- How would your selflessness have an impact on your family, community, and country?
Question
Why do some people start and never finish?

John’s Answer
The bookends of success are starting and finishing. Some people never start. If you don’t have the discipline to do what you must when you need to do it, you have no shot at success. No good thing floats to you. However, some people are in love with starting. John has a family member who loves to start. He’s had 17 different jobs. He says, “I’ve finally found something I want to do.” It usually lasts 3-4 months. He’s a perpetual optimist about things he’s never done. But note - there is no such thing as someone who always finishes but never starts.

People who never finish don’t understand that:
1. 90% of the reward comes on the back end, not the front end. The fruit is at the end, not the beginning.
2. They are developing a habit that will sabotage their success. Quitting becomes a habit. John’s dad let him know that if he started, he would have to finish. “When you made the choice to start, you made the choice to finish. It’s not two choices; it’s one.” When you fail — because you will — the question is, “Are you going to quit, or finish?”
3. Not finishing makes people unreliable, and others don’t want to work with them. When you work with a quitter, you’ve handcuffed yourself to him. If you hang out with people who blow themselves up, they will blow you up.
4. Quitters lose a bit of their self-esteem every time they quit. They begin internally to label themselves. I’ve never found a person with a high self-image who quits all the time. There is a pride in accomplishment.

Reflect and Take Action
- What accomplishments in your life give you the most satisfaction? Remember the positive emotion, the pride and joy, and harness that feeling for motivation to complete unfinished work.
- What is the cost of quitting? Who and/or what are you affecting, and in what ways?
- Have you ever not started something because you were concerned you couldn’t finish? Why?
- Consider projects you have started and not finished. Create a plan of action to complete even just one. Start with something small. Celebrate. Then attack something larger. What will be your reward for finishing and not quitting?
Mentorship

Question
What are the key things to look for in a mentor?

John’s Answer
It is impossible to reach your potential without a mentor in your life. Most of John’s greatest thinking has been done by someone else. Can you make discoveries and do everything on your own? Yes, if you have a thousand years to do it. The quickest way to learn is from others’ successes.

Do learning lunches. That’s how John learned the Law of the Lid. John had lunch with Don Stevenson and asked him, “When buying a bankrupt company, what do you always do?” His answer: 1) Teach relationships skills. 2) Fire the president.

Putting yourself under somebody is essential. You need several mentors. Ask people to mentor you according to their area of expertise. John has mentors in relationships, team building, etc.

What John looks for in a mentor:
1. Success in the area where I’m seeking advice.
2. Does this person care for me? You really need to like each other. There needs to be chemistry.
3. Teachability. You want to learn from someone who is still learning. Passion comes from what you’re doing now, not what you were doing yesterday.

Reflect and Take Action

- Do you have a faculty of mentors? Who are they and what areas of expertise do they support you in? Is there an area or expertise in your life where you need a mentor?

- John does learning lunches with his mentors. They can be mentors for a lifetime, a season, or just a lunch. You can also be mentored from afar through reading and listening to experts in different areas. How and how often do you interact with your mentors? Consider setting up intentional learning lunches to connect with your mentors and allow them to pour into you.

- Ask your mentors who is mentoring them. You always want to follow others who are being mentored themselves. Consider learning from afar from your mentor’s mentor.

- Whom are you mentoring? You don’t need to have all of the answers, just the desire to add value to someone, vulnerability to be transparent, and willingness to keep learning yourself.
Question
How can we know when it’s time to take a risk and have the courage to do it?

John’s Answer
Most things can be accomplished in small steps. Don’t underestimate or undervalue small steps. Small steps every day make for a big leap someday. However, there are times when you can’t small-step it – for example, when making a change in locations, careers, etc. So this is a question of risk. When do I risk a lot to achieve a lot?

1. The reward needs to be potentially greater than the risk. Ask yourself, what is the reward on the other side? Don’t take a giant leap for a small reward. Don’t risk a lot for a little.

2. You may not be certain you can achieve it, but you must know it’s achievable.

3. Know what the downside is. Ask yourself, “Does the downside hold potential disaster — disaster that I can’t recover from?” It’s okay to fail. It’s not okay to fail from something you can’t recover from.

Before taking the giant leap, talk to others who’ve taken it successfully.

John has never known someone who took the leap, made it, and regretted it. But there are people who didn’t try to make the leap and regretted it. People die slowly because they don’t take risks. Many people in their 40s and 50s are already regretting it. The only thing worse than not making a decision back then, is not making it now. The decisions you regret in life are the ones you didn’t make. And you will be haunted by the question, “What if?”

Some people tried the risk and failed, but they are still satisfied because they had the courage to try. They have self-respect, even though they didn’t get what they expected. Everyone doesn’t expect to get to the top. But they want a shot at it.

Reflect and Take Action
• John talks about The Rule of Five – the five actions you should take every day to be successful. These small, daily disciplines allow you to take on more risks and make more changes in bite-sized pieces. What is your Rule of 5? John says it can take years to develop your core five actions, but make today the day you write down the first draft.

• Whom do you seek out when considering a major change in your life? Has this person made this same change successfully in the past? Have they given wise counsel in other areas in your life?

• What does failing forward mean to you?

• What risk are you not taking because you’re scared to fail? Consider what’s at stake and be creative in your thinking about how to fail forward even if you try and fail.
Question
How do you rebuild trust in an organization when it’s been broken?

John’s Answer
In nearly every leadership situation, there comes a time when you have to rebuild trust. It begins by being honest and transparent about your weaknesses, frailties, and mistakes. And you have to be comfortable with them.

Leaders should communicate their weaknesses to their team. The team already knows the leader’s weaknesses. It’s important that the team know that the leader knows his or her own weaknesses. It’s a relief to the team.

1. Understand your humanness.
2. Be comfortable with it.
3. Communicate it to others. Be open and honest about your mistakes.
4. Ask forgiveness.
5. Learn from your mistakes and be willing to change.
6. Give it the time it needs.

Understand that broken trust stops everything, or at least slows it down. People don’t expect their leaders to be perfect. They only expect them to be honest.

Reflect and Take Action
- How differently do teams and organizations function in environments of trust and suspicion?
- What are different ways to diagnose or detect a lack of trust?
- Trust is a leader’s currency. When the leader has trust, the team functions at its highest capacity. Without trust, communication, motivation, and ultimately performance suffer.
- Have you been open and honest about your mistakes with others? How can you ask for forgiveness? How will you change that behavior in the future?
- What are your weaknesses? How do you compensate for these – work longer and harder, but not smarter; delegate; drop the ball? Be honest. This is a self-assessment. Whether this is easy or difficult for you, consider inviting someone you trust to answer this question for you. Be open to the feedback you receive.
Coaching Culture

Question
Is it possible to create a sustainable coaching culture in an organization?

John’s Answer
To create a sustainable coaching culture, you have to make it your priority. It can’t be an event or program to be sustainable. That has a short lifespan. But if it becomes a lifestyle, you can do it. In John’s organization, it was expected and assumed.

If people are our most appreciable asset, then you need to spend time and money improving them. There’s no way to develop people if they are not a priority. To make development sustainable, make it a lifestyle. Put time and energy in it.

Very little in John’s life has been due to self-discovery. It’s been due to good mentoring and coaching.

You can’t build a coaching company on a one-hit wonder. Success requires continual development.

Reflect and Take Action

- Think of an organization you are familiar with that values and develops its people. What are that organization’s leaders doing to coach and mentor their team? How can you translate their actions into your organization?

- Do you believe people are your most appreciable asset? Do your actions reflect that sentiment? If not, what values are you communicating through your actions? John says people do what people see – if the leader treats the team with high value, they will replicate that behavior.

- During your next budgeting season, consider what money – and therefore time and energy – you are willing to allocate to coaching and mentoring your team, and when you are willing to spend it. Not all aspects of a sustainable development program cost money, but wherever your money goes, there also will go your attitudes and behavior. Be willing to fund the culture you want to create.

- Whom will you personally coach? How will you ensure that your team then turns around and coaches others?