

Inside Out

Linda Sasser



Wow, this is an incredible lesson. My first application suggestion is that you listen to it at least twice. John's message will make you question how "*inside-out*" you are as a leader. It may make you uncomfortable, it may reinforce what you are doing, or it may inspire change.

Being an *Inside-Out Leader* is a personal decision that comes from the inside. It's the heart of leading and serving others. Therefore to apply this philosophy you will have to believe in people; at all levels; leaving perceived power and entitlement behind.

John uses Nelson Mandela as his *Inside-Out Leader* example. What an incredible example for someone at such a level to daily perform uncommon acts of leading from the heart. While Nelson Mandela may seem like a distant leader to learn from, his actions are so close to our every day opportunities. Inviting the driver in for a meal... that's something each of us can execute. It isn't something that only high- powered leaders can strategically pull off. Yet, sometimes it seems that the higher a leader rises in command the less likely they are to be concerned with the small, non-glamorous acts. This is caused by the temptations that having more power brings.

I like the way John presented this lesson because John himself is an *Inside-Out Leader*. Yet, you'll notice, his lesson wasn't about him. He was exposing another *Inside-Out Leader*. This begs the question... Do we have the right lens to determine whether we are an *Inside-Out Leader*? Or is this something others determine?

Theory Meets Reality

For this application piece I sought wisdom from leaders in the middle of organizations. Who better to give us clarity on the actions they see from *Inside-Out Leaders*. This is when the theory of leadership meets the true reality of leadership!

The colleagues I talked to are stewards within four different companies. I asked them to speak into this lesson. I inquired and gathered their feedback on what *Inside-Out Leadership* looks like when it is in action and what it does for the morale and culture of the organization. I also wanted to know more about how they can spot the differences between *Inside-Out Leaders* and *Outside-In Leaders*... from their view in the middle.

I have consolidated their replies in the following bullet points... I'd like for each of us to read this with an ***application mindset***. Described below are actions and beliefs that we as leaders need to start or stop applying.

- Let others on the team be a part. Include us in your thinking before you make a decision. Ask us for feedback and input. Seek the best answer, not necessarily "your" answer.
- My former leader would take time to get my input. I remember being asked questions like the following in our one-on-one meetings:
 - What specific areas of improvement do I need to make to help you grow?
 - What specific areas of improvement do I need to make to help the company grow?
 - What type of leadership do you feel the company needs during this season of growth?
- Learn with us. Don't stop learning about leadership yourself and keep the subject alive by discussing ways we can be better leaders for our company.
 - Our team studies leadership together and then we hold each other accountable to live it out. Since we discuss and learn together with our leader it is open territory to grin, or give thumbs up, when we see each other acting on what we learned.

- Treat us like you treat yourself. Don't associate leadership with extra perks or privileges.
 - I'll never forget being several months pregnant and parking way out in the parking lot on a snowy day while the CEO of our company had a reserved front door parking spot.
- Teach us the philosophy behind your decisions so we can learn. Be consistent in how you make decisions. Over time this will give us confidence in knowing your heart and we can then make better decisions on your behalf.
 - And when we start making better decisions, don't become a control freak thinking it makes you look bad. To us, the best leader is the one with the best developed team who can carry on when the leader isn't present.
- I've worked for an *Inside-Out Leader* **AND** an *Outside-In Leader*. The biggest difference I saw was that the *Inside-Out Leader* was a teammate on our team. We were the first priority and then their work followed (a lot of times after hours). We felt valued and we were willing to do all we could to help her. The *Outside-In Leader* was just the opposite. Instead of being on the team, they dictated what the team did while expecting respect from the team. Basically, we were there to serve them. This created a stagnant environment of doing only what we were told to do.
- Whose fault is it? The *Inside-Out Leaders* seemed to always take the fall if there was a problem yet when success was celebrated... the team was in the spotlight.
 - It made us want to fight for our leader even more when he opened up and admitted his mistakes. We know you make mistakes, but when you try to sweep them under the rug it's disturbing especially when we get reprimanded for our mistakes.
- Righting a wrong - the most amazing thing my leader has done is to take responsibility in front of the client, department, and even the company, for a project I messed up on. He said it was his lack of clear communication. My indebtedness to that act has made me give above and beyond and has made me treat my teammates differently.
- My leader takes the time and spends the energy to pour into others. Every day in some way she takes advantage of teachable moments with all levels of employees from interns to the leadership team. Her focus is growing those around her.

What's your story going to be? Will those around you describe you as an *Inside-Out Leader* or an *Outside-In Leader*? Better yet, what are your day-to-day actions telling them?

Remember our goal is for each MIC lesson to serve and motivate us all month. So, this month, let's intentionally focus on the three questions above and look for moments where we can impact others by leading *Inside-Out*.

"If we are bigger on the inside than we are on the outside, then over time we will have greater influence on the outside."

- John C. Maxwell



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