

Daily Leadership Development
365 Steps to Becoming a Better Leader

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First Edition

For information: riggioleadership.org

ISBN-13 9781663548481

Introduction: How to Use This Book

This book is intended to be a guide to help you learn more about leadership and to develop your leadership skills and potential. I have been researching and teaching leadership and organizational psychology for four decades, and nearly everything that I've learned has been incorporated into this book. You will find it a valuable resource on your leadership development journey.

Every entry is thoroughly grounded in the latest research and practice in leadership and organizational behavior. There are self-assessments to measure leader competencies, personality traits, and behavioral styles. The book contains practical explanations of leadership theories, concepts, and skills, to widen your knowledge base. In addition, there are resources and ideas provided to help you with your development as a leader. You may want to keep a notebook handy to record your thoughts and reflections and to score some of the assessments. Keeping a daily or weekly journal is also recommended. Additional resources are available at riggioladership.org.

A Day at a Time, A Week at a Time

The book is divided into weekly and daily topics. Each day offers a short essay focusing on one aspect of leadership, that are then organized under weekly themes. You can read one per day, or cover a week at a time (or more). You can even skip around if you like. For each entry there are tips for leadership development. Leadership development takes time and reflection, so don't move too quickly through this guidebook.

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Week 1: Getting Started

Day 1

Do You Have the Strength to Lead?

Leadership is about character.

Of course, I'm talking about inner strength, not physical ability (although physical health is important for leaders). What are some of the types of strength that leaders should possess to be effective?

Character Strengths are critically important. Do you have the courage to lead effectively—to stand by your convictions? The courage to take calculated risks? And the courage to do the right thing? Do you have the strength to admit when you are wrong? Can you control your emotions? Do you have the strength to be fair – to fight against systems or people who are unfair?

The Strength to Develop, Sacrifice, and Succeed

An effective leader also shows inner strength by admitting to shortcomings and seeking to rectify these and to develop more fully as a leader. Leaders also display inner strength when they sacrifice for the good of the team and the organization, and when they fight hard to overcome obstacles to success.

For Development: The good news is that we can develop these strengths of character, whether we are in a leadership position, or not. Let's begin by making a commitment to develop as a leader and as an individual of solid character.

Day 2

Leader Development vs. Leadership Development

What's the difference?

My colleague, David Day¹, has made a clear distinction between leader development—which focuses on developing individual leaders' skills and competencies—and leadership development, which tries to build the shared leadership capacity of the leader and the members of the work team. We focus nearly all of our energy on leader development, and this is where we fall short.

All too often, in both leadership development programs and in the study of leadership, we neglect the key role that followers play in the equation. I find myself doing this when teaching students about leadership—we over-focus on the importance of the leader and what the leader does. Rarely do we give serious attention to the role that followers play—are they merely being obedient followers, passively going along, or do they question the leader and hold the leader accountable?

In this book, we will focus on both leader development—helping you become an exemplary leader. We will also focus on leadership development—helping you to increase the leadership capacity in your team or department. How do we do the latter? By engaging followers and developing their capacity to work with leaders and together co-construct “leadership.”

For Development: A leader without engaged and committed followers will not produce leadership. Consider how you can leverage your followers' leadership capacity to help you lead better.

Day 3

Why Do You Want to be a Leader?

What motivates you to lead?

ASSESSMENT: On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

1. I am the type of person who likes to be in charge of others.
2. I usually want to be the leader in the groups that I work in.
3. I am only interested to lead a group if there are clear advantage for me.
4. Leading others is really more of a dirty job rather than an honorable one.
5. I feel I have a duty to lead others if I am asked.
6. It is not right to decline leadership roles.

An important piece of research by Chan and Drasgow² talks about individual differences in an individual's "motivation to lead"—examining the reasons why someone might choose a leadership position. They focus on three types of motivation:

Affective Identity. This motivation to lead comes from an actual enjoyment of being in a leadership position.

Calculative-Non-Calculative motivation to lead involves the extent to which an individual weighs the costs and benefits of taking on a leadership role. Leadership has its benefits and its burdens. A person high on non-calculative motivation to lead, doesn't much consider the costs and benefits.

Social-Normative motivation to lead is feeling an obligation to lead. For example, other people might call on you or nominate you to take on a leadership position, and that social pressure motivates you to lead. An individual might also feel an obligation to take on leadership in order to take on a cause—a social movement—or to enact change.

[Scoring: Items 1 & 2 = Affective Identity; Items 3 & 4 = Calculative; Items 5 & 6 = Social-Normative]. Pay attention to the scales with the highest scores.

For Development: Which is your strongest type of motivation to lead. Why is motivation to lead important? It helps provide insight into what motivates a person to lead, and provides a foundation for future leadership development. Think about how your personal motivation to lead can affect you and your future as a leader.

Day 4

How Do Leaders Really Develop?

What is the leader development process?

To truly develop as a leader there are two distinct processes at work. We refer to these as top-down and bottom-up processing. They work together in leader development.

Top-down processing involves acquiring knowledge about leadership. This can be from leadership/management classes, from observation of good leaders, from reading about great leaders, or from learning from mentors.

Bottom-up processing comes from leadership experiences either on the job, or in trainings/simulations. Bottom-up processing involves analysis of the situational elements in which one leads; and learning first-hand about the dynamics of leader-follower relationships, organizational politics, and norms and roles in the leadership situation.

These two processes work together in leader development. Top-down processing provides information and ideas that can be used in developing leadership strategies. Bottom-up processing allows the leader to ascertain how effective different leadership strategies are in the actual work or community setting. Both are important.

In this guide, we will offer both top-down and bottom-up strategies. You will learn about leadership, as well as learning how to lead.

For Development: Learning about leadership—about theories, methods, and techniques—actually helps because it provides understanding of the dynamics and processes of leadership. Read regularly about leadership, but also learn to profit from experiences. Put the two together, and this is how great leaders develop.

Day 5

Your First Step to Becoming a Strong Leader

This is a critical prerequisite for all leaders

Self-awareness is crucial for developing as a leader. It is essential that a leader have a deep understanding of oneself, including leadership strengths and shortcomings. Self-awareness also means understanding one's values and motives. Douglas T. Hall³ suggests that self-awareness involves a leader's ability to be truly conscious of the self, and the ability to observe it accurately and objectively.

Unfortunately, for many of us, this is not easy.

That's why it is important to constantly be attuned to feedback from others, whether it is offered, or you actively solicit it. This is the idea behind 360-degree feedback—getting performance feedback from all angles, from those who report to you, from your supervisor, from peers, and from customers or external sources (if appropriate).

For Development: Get in the habit of soliciting feedback from those whom you lead on a regular basis. Pay attention to supervisors' evaluations of your strengths and weaknesses. Approach all of this with an open mind, trying not to get defensive. Use this information to target areas for improvement/development, and leverage your strengths to your advantage.

Weekend 1

Days 6 & 7

Why Self-Reflection is Critical to Leader Development

Reflection makes learning “stick.”

If you began reading this book on a Monday at work, this is your first weekend! What better time to talk about self-reflection?

If we are to truly develop as leaders it is important to pause now and then and reflect on the lessons we have learned. This can be done systematically—what the military calls “After Action Reviews” (AARs), whereby a structured evaluation and reflection is conducted after any important leadership action or event. Or, it can be done more informally. [We will discuss AARs in depth later].

Weekends are good times to reflect on our leadership in the prior week. What went right? What went wrong? How could things have been handled better? What lessons have I learned to guide my leadership in the future?

For Development: Get into the habit of regularly reflecting on your leadership. When can you do this? You can set a structured time, or you can do it during your “downtime.” You can journal or you might talk things over with a partner.

I often find myself engaging in self-reflection when I awake in the middle of the night and can’t immediately go back to sleep. It is a good, quiet time for me to self-reflect on the previous week’s actions (and, when done reflecting, it helps me to feel good about myself and go back to sleep).

Use this first weekend to reflect on why you want to be a leader, and if you have the motivation and strength to develop. My colleague, David Day, uses the analogy of a gym membership for leader development: If you don’t put the time in and work at it, no development will take place.

