

High Road Leadership

John Maxwell has been a leadership guru and prolific writer for a long time, and his latest entry into the leadership literature field is High Road Leadership. Seemingly a simple concept, High Road Leadership is more than what we traditionally think of as a high road person.

We usually think of high road people as ones that are honest, won't take advantage of those with less leverage, and generally nice people. But a deeper dive into high road leadership reveals much more. High Road leaders can be strong, they can win for their organizations, and they can build highly successful and profitable organizations. Maxwell describes some of the best practices that he's seen in leadership and has practiced himself. Applying these principles to your leadership skills is a recipe for great progress and success.

One of the prominent principles that Maxwell brings to the fore is that of valuing everyone, whether they can offer you something or not. While reading this book, I realized how I had failed in this principle. I thought of people in my life and within my leadership scope that we would call EGF (extra grace required). These are the folks we just don't know how to handle. We see them as limited in what they can bring to the table or the team. Conversations with them can be exhausting and excruciating. It's hard to show genuine interest in them, and we become dismissive.

When I realized my own failings in this area, I reached out to a few EGF people I lead. I asked them genuine questions about how they were doing, and what I could do to help them. While there are limitations to what we can do for EGF folks, being authentically interested in their progress is crucially important as we demonstrate to them that they matter to us, and we want to see them succeed.

Maxwell also delineates the concept of win-win. Too many in leadership believe that there's always a winner and a loser in transactions and negotiations. High Road leaders strive to provide win-win results. Often, when negotiating with suppliers I try to find a way for us both to benefit from working together. I may not want them to be able to retire tomorrow because they took me to the cleaners on a transaction, but I still want them to be in business the next time I need them. So, a win deal for me and a win deal for them is what I strive for.

A common theme we see in current leadership literature involves authenticity, humility, and vulnerability. Maxwell shares the story of a CEO who told him that he could not afford to be vulnerable as he would lose all credibility with his team. Maxwell's response was that the CEO was already in trouble, because his team already knew his failings. We don't hide nearly as much as we think we do.

High Road leaders want the best for the people they lead, and that is evident by their leadership. Incidentally, when a leader puts this principle into practice, organizations and teams thrive. If you are looking to break through people leadership obstacles, this book is a definite must read.

(Credit John Maxwell, High Road Leadership, Maxwell Leadership, 2024)

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