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Six Laws of Exceptional Leadership

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Attending the performance of a symphony orchestra is a great opportunity to experience the beauty of bringing diverse instruments together. For exceptional leaders, such a performance can serve as a reminder of how amazing things can result when various elements work together for one outcome.

But there is something bigger that you can take from the experience — an understanding of the importance of a strong leader. Consider this: while an orchestra's conductor does not play an instrument, he or she is arguably the most important member of the symphony. After all, the conductor is responsible for ensuring that each player knows his or her part and for delivering a polished presentation to the orchestra. Adding AI to these efforts is a multi-faceted approach that involves leveraging advanced algorithms, data analysis, and automation. These can assist in optimizing revenue growth including team building and improved decision making.

Some professionals feel out of tune in their efforts to make decisions and have them implemented. It is crucial to remember, however, that leadership is a highly focused activity that must be internally orchestrated. You must decide which advice to take, determine which of the available tools and strategies will work, assign implementation tasks, hold people accountable, weigh the risks, and consider the impact on a future legacy. These are the exceptional leadership tasks we will discuss in detail. To grow into a leadership role, remember this quote from James Crook:

"A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back to the audience."

This section will detail our 6 LAWS OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP and add examples of steps Google and others have taken to demonstrate real-world implementation tactics. Just think for a minute; when you go to the grocery store, do you shop for tissue or Kleenex? In your office, do you copy or Xerox? When you need information, do you research or Google it? Managers, executives, consultants, non-profits, and current leaders who follow these 6 LAWS will have a structure to serve them well in their professional growth and success.

Through my work as a chief executive, professor, and as an advisor to managing partners, agency administrators, other chief executives, and professors, I have identified 6 skills that are each crucially linked in order to become an "exceptional leader." They are called:

6 LAWS OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. **Leaders Listen**
2. **Leaders Make Decisions**
3. **Leaders Communicate Decisions**
4. **Leaders Hold People Accountable for Results**
5. **Leaders Take Risks**
6. **Leaders Leave a Legacy**



1. LEADERS LISTEN

Leaders must become effective at listening. The input necessary for a leader to make a wise decision or when to take a risk needs to come from trusted advisors. And an exceptional leader knows that often the best advice comes from the “followers.” Leadership is about knowing what advice to ask advisors for, what the questions are, and who to ask.

“Good leaders listen to the sound of no one following, or the stampede of followers.”

Author Anon

As the chief executive of a large public organization, our Human Resources Director retired. He had been one of my most trusted advisors and clearly contributed to our success. When I announced his successor, I was asked why I appointed him. I answered, “Because he can say no.” Your advisors must be stand-up people.

This leadership law relates directly to a strategy that looks to the greatest impact and rapid implementation. Could the two founders of Google have thought up the thousands of products and services the company offers without listening? They started with one simple mission: organize everything out there. But do keep in mind that even simple, commonplace ideas can lead to major consumer success and revenue, such as 3M’s “Post-its.”

Creating a successful roadmap for the future takes not only a closer look at the past but also a clear examination of the challenges facing the company now and in the immediate future. AI can be highly efficient in this task. Whether it’s a new or prospective concern, understanding your company’s challenges is key to developing a

successful strategy with all possibilities considered. A preliminary assessment of these challenges is a great and necessary technique that helps align your company's success with the goals established. It means listen!

"Too many executives plan for what they want, not what will be."

Anon

During this research and discovery process, there are a number of items you'll need to address:

- The strategic direction now and in the next 5 years;
- The challenges and obstacles in the way of these goals;
- Any uncertainties or recent changes in the company;
- Any competitor or industry concerns;
- Any new products or services that will impact the business.

Lastly, as you get close to the decision point, make sure all interests are aligned. The internal working relationships you have built over the years and interactions with customers and clients should now be ready to become important advocates and spokespeople for the upcoming decision.

"It takes courage to stand up and lead. It takes real courage to sit down and listen."

Winston Churchill



2. LEADERS MAKE DECISIONS

If your decisions are not clearly communicated and stand out in the minds of your bosses and followers, the marketplace, and investors, it will be difficult to convert the decisions into action. People watch the Super Bowl each year as much for the commercials as they do for the big game. And while you will not have an audience as large, there are still some valuable decision-making lessons to learn from the big-brand ads.

When polled each year about which Super Bowl commercials were the most successful, those whose ads had a repeated presence during the game were ranked as the most successful. Whether or not fans like Coke, Budweiser, or Doritos, these brands certainly do an excellent job of keeping their names in front of the viewers. Your decisions must do the same – do not just issue them and then stand back. Remain in contact with those you have delegated to lead the implementation.

If obstacles or delays are encountered, identify ideas for collaboration or new steps to take. And continue to call for direct action.

Sound decision-making must “always keep the end in mind.” In every significant decision, take in the longer range view of the desired end result, and incorporate those goals into the designated actions.

For those continuing to grow in their organizations, your decision-making must be highly focused on those areas where you have management control, responsibility for, and impact on the project. Those who will promote you in the future will be watching your results closely, especially as it impacts their own career growth.

We all make decisions, all the time, 3,000 per day. But as indicated above, leaders must make decisions about how to get from here to there. Recognize that taking too much time in mulling over a decision is, in itself, making a decision, i.e. doing nothing.

Think about the decision-making that Google went through in creating the Android system in 2007. They recognized the need to open alliances with other companies in order to find success. There are now more than 1 billion devices using it.

A note about so-called consensus or collegial management: they tend to cause great delays, add cost to almost every decision (if one is actually made), and do not demonstrate true leadership or much revenue. One has only to look at university bureaucracies to understand.

One of our largest clients, a professional service firm, had great difficulty making decisions. So they just kept adding committees to study, review, and recommend. In the end, the chief executive began to realize that having so many groups, with so many overlapping functions and the same group of people on 3 to 4 of these committees was not efficient. There were way too many bosses and leaders, some with nothing to do.

With intense meetings with 50 of their 700+ professionals, the reorganization plan was not only accepted and implemented but is still actively in use.

“Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous. You get knocked down by traffic on both sides.”

Margaret Thatcher



3. LEADERS COMMUNICATE DECISIONS

Third in the LEADERSHIP LAWS is communicating decisions to the people who will direct implementation and actively participate in the project. Also observing your directions will be the marketplace, investors, and media. The decisions must be clear and concise. Know those you will be relying on to get action. Many will be former colleagues and at other levels within the organization. Google must have been superb at internal (and) marketplace communications.

We live in a fast-paced world. We're always in a hurry: faster cars, faster Internet, texting, and near-constant multi-tasking. With everything moving so quickly, we often forget to slow down and make real connections with people. They are the ones who will be implementing your decisions.

Don't underestimate the power of a personal connection. Really good executives realize making a connection is a two-way street that requires effort and reciprocity. Building this rapport gives your followers a greater sense of confidence about your trustworthiness and, therefore your decisions.

The following are a few simple steps to take during the listening phase of decision-making that will enhance the success of the decisions.

- A. Show that preparation is an asset. Don't hesitate to show or refer to your notes during meetings – signs that you are doing your homework.
- B. Use the pre-meeting research to demonstrate what you have learned, the challenges to be faced, and what is really needed.
- C. Work with them to create a clear, concise definition of the needs or challenges to be met.
- D. Be clear about the objective/end goal of the decision. Build that sense of confidence in helping you make it work.
- E. Don't overlook using AI when "listening" It can help your team confirm all positive information.

The key is to focus on who you know and who you can get to know. With strong relationships and some internal and external improvements, you can significantly reduce complexity and streamline the communication process.

We are all in the people business. And people are creatures of communication. Remember, every product and service is designed by people, built by people, sold by and to people. To me, this means not only must you have

knowledge of the organization’s structure and its staffing – the bosses and followers. It also means knowing who you can rely on at every level of your company, firm, or agency.

As that well known Prussian, Frederick the Great pointed out:

“The more I get to know people, the more I love my dog!”

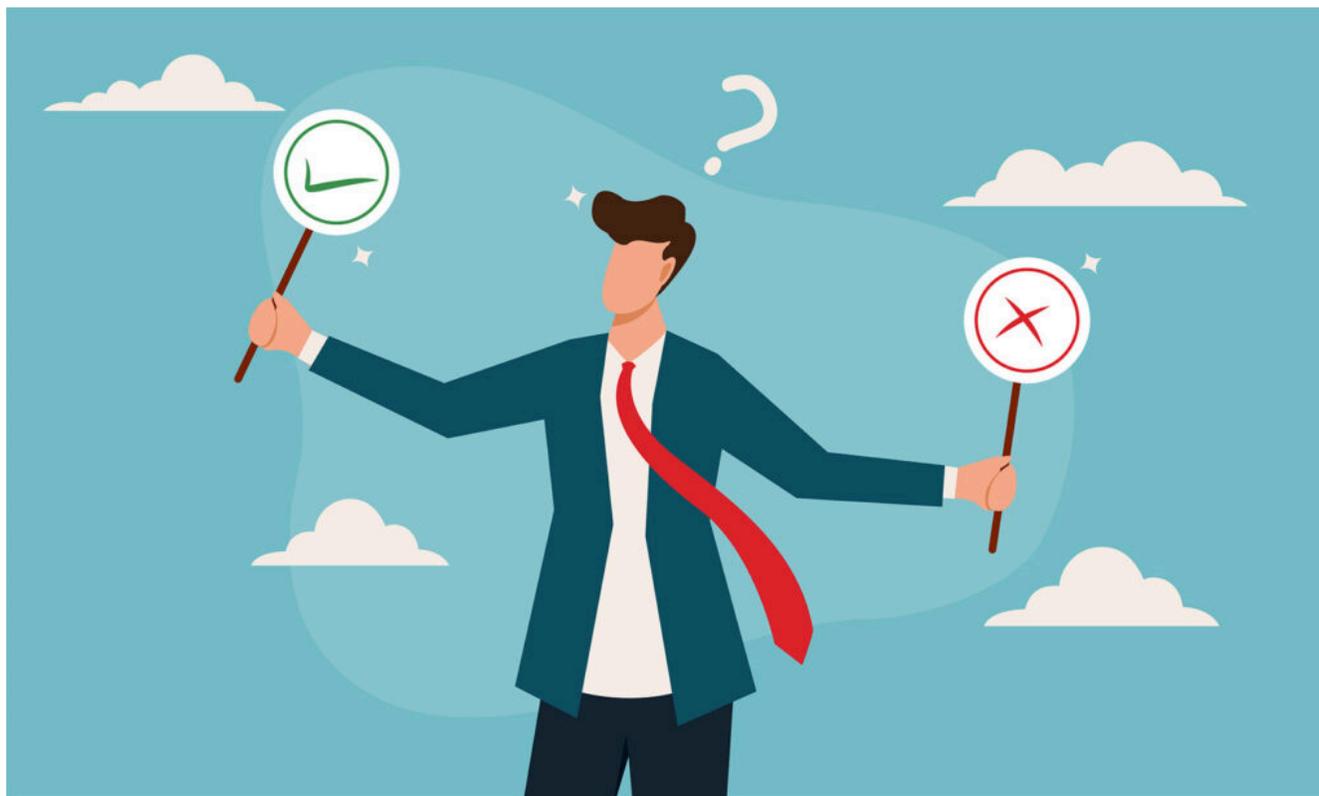
Think back to an assignment when you were a follower. Was the leader willing to listen, make decisions, and follow up with you? Did you bring energy and skill to the table? With the multiple projects Google has undertaken, think about the analysis they undertook to ensure communications were clear and concise. What may have started as an internal review of what people were searching for in 2001, and whether or not their systems were meeting expectations, a new project arose – Google Zeitgeist. It is now made public every year.

In our firm’s U.S. and Canada Survey on Client Retention, the primary reason a long-term company/firm relationship was terminated by a client was, “Diminished Communications.” 21% said their clients became dissatisfied, 9% said the client never told them why, and 6% said it was due to lack of contact. A total of 36% of the respondents failed to communicate directly. How could they not know a client was dissatisfied? And 6% openly admitted they failed themselves. The moral is that leaders not only have to communicate often, but need to be clear and client-centric.

Keep in mind the need to ensure the people who you rely on to communicate decisions – both up and down – are actively following up with all of your people. They will have an impact on your success and your future career.

“When we put our best foot forward, the other one had better be good enough to stand on.”

Cullen Hightower



4. LEADERS HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESULTS

The weakest link in the Exceptional Leadership chain is often accountability – following up. I’ve worked with hundreds of firms, companies, and agencies. What I’ve seen over and over again is this lack of holding people

accountable for results. And yet, this is the key to leadership success. And I've seen this from my leadership, boss, and follower positions.

In our consulting engagements, we consistently spend the largest percentage of our time in follow-up, reminding people of their commitments, moving them ahead of possible obstacles, and not letting them skip necessary "next steps." These clients not only call my partners and me mentors but often "tormentors."

And it is this tormentor role that makes sure things happen. Your bosses and followers must get involved and actively become "tormentors." As their leader, it is your responsibility to hold them accountable for the results of your decision.

"Effective leadership is putting things first. Effective Management is discipline, carrying it out."

Steven Covey

We know about Google's financial success and its relationship to accountability. But let's look at another vital decision they made on their commitment to the environment. From their earliest beginnings, ongoing follow-up has led to solar panels on their facilities, purchasing wind power, providing charging stations for their employees, and spending over \$1 billion to date. Talk about commitment and follow-up. Talk about results.

Well-organized follow-up focuses accountability on activities that have the greatest impact and value.

Multiply the use of individual operational tools to leverage wider exposure and generate additional involvement.

- A. Establish clear goals and timelines.
- B. Provide a format for building future participation.
- C. Measure and report successes often.
- D. Analyze both successes and rejections to improve future actions.

Developing your group's talents in this manner, while perhaps costing money, will produce a higher ROI. And reworking underperforming internal processes can increase efficiency and decrease time spent in making things happen. Conduct these as regularly scheduled check-ups.

Google "has an uncanny knack for returning extremely relevant results."

PC Magazine



5. LEADERS TAKE RISKS

Law number 5 is taking risks. Risk-taking is often the difference between success and failure as a leader, especially in setting targets to grow new products and services, and to enter new markets. Too often, leaders only look inward, reinventing the same old products or problems. But in today's business world, the imperative needs to look outward and not just refine what already exists. This is a key to developing a reputation as an innovative thinker.

And risk-taking does not mean "bet the company" type risks. Remember, Google was founded based on one question: "What's out there that we can gather?" And once the concept was identified, the founders pointed everyone in a single direction and drove the team. In the beginning, they were the leaders with advisors. But once a decision was made, the bosses and followers took over and built the system in the face of great risk. Just think of all of their products and services that have come from risk-taking: Google AdWords, Images, News (from 4,000 to 50,000 news sources), Maps, etc.

Working for a 15,000 employee organization, I was tasked with refining and improving new business development. In my presentation to the Directors, I indicated that there were more than 50 positions being paid by the marketing department that had nothing to do with marketing. The president of the largest division challenged me by saying that does not apply to my group. Not wanting to embarrass him but needing to risk the point, I named the 8 people in that division that met this criteria. After a hush for several seconds, he replied, "They are all gone tomorrow."

Breaking through the mold of conformity is no easy task. If done right, a non-conforming approach is rightly viewed as creative, making you stand out among the masses. It isn't necessary to revamp your entire organization; just shake up the system a bit to really stand out in the decision-making process.

The idea is to not limit your company to the same old practices that stifle creativity and ingenuity.

- A. Clarify what the objective is and why it is important to the organization's future.
- B. Ensure all involved understand the importance of providing this substantial value.
- C. Identify concrete tasks that can be developed and improved along the way.
- D. Prepare to follow up after the approach is stated and the risk identified.

“People will do the what if they understand the why”

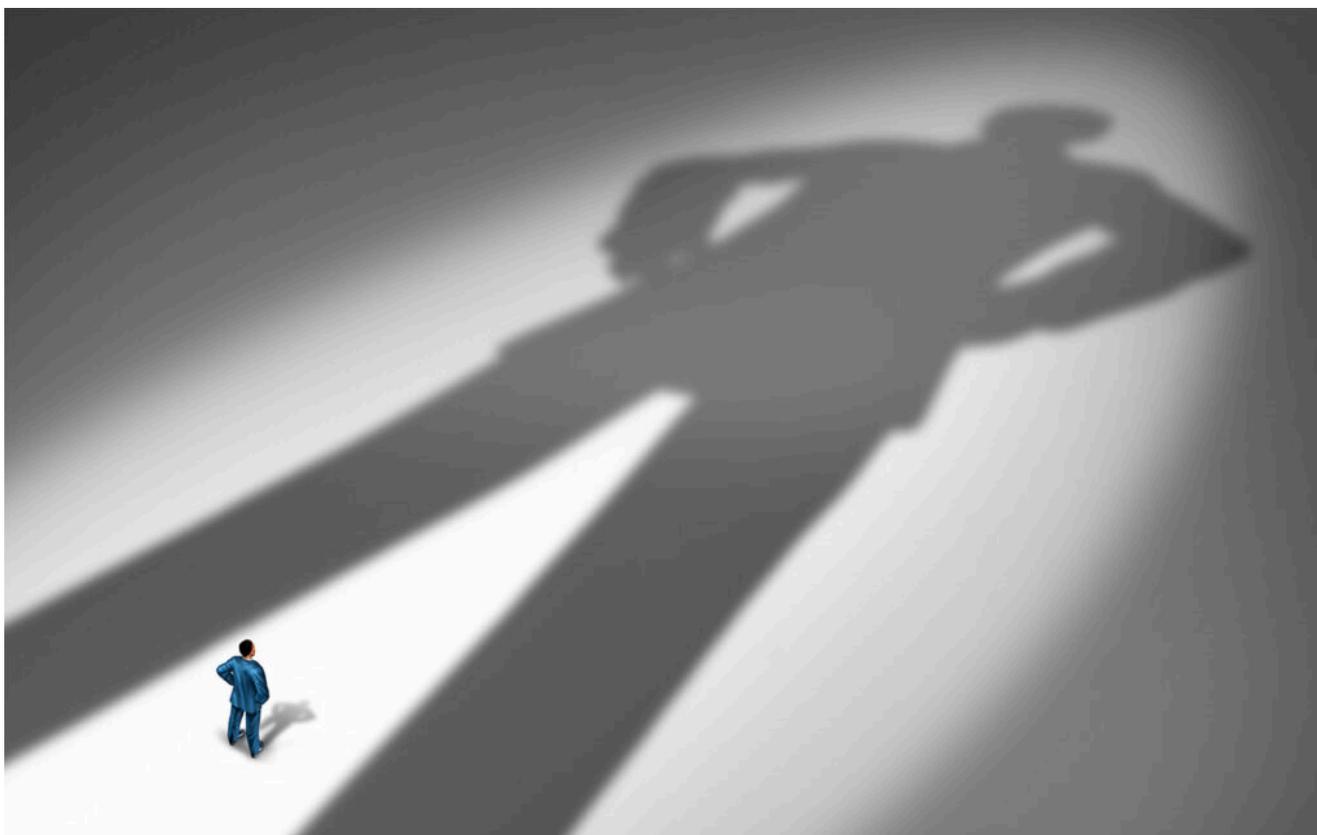
Mary Barra, CEO General Motors

If you want your firm to have deep roots and a solid foundation, you need to build from a strong base. And while this foundation needs to contain elements like tactics, ideals, and approaches, the main ingredients are the professionals you rely on. Finding, hiring, and cultivating them will create this base that you will always be able to rely on and be proud of in any situation.

These are the very people you will be relying upon in the first law of leadership, listening.

“Opportunities are like busses. If you miss one, another will be coming along.”

Sir Richard Branson



6. LEADERS LEAVE A LEGACY

Risk often leads to legacy, the last of the Leadership Laws. Exceptional leaders want to leave a legacy to their organizations including a positive impact on the followers, the people in the organization, and not just on the organization itself.

Every business and non-profit has something that sets it apart. When clients are having difficulty pinning down what makes them different, we work with them to identify it and build a strategy around that difference. Here's an example of risk leading to legacy, directly from the world of sports.

Competitive alpine skiers – whether they focus on downhill, the slalom, the giant slalom, or the super-G – know that in order to achieve their goals, they need a specific action plan. In the case of alpine skiing at the Winter Olympics, that action plan starts by determining which events the skier will race (**listening**), and then moves on to focus on breaking down the course, identifying the right path to make the jump or turn (**decisions**), and analyzing the terrain and conditions (**communicating/adapting**), in order to ensure that when they arrive at the bottom of the hill, they produce a winning time (**risks**).

When sports' analysts comment on the downhill events, their focus is on two things: the course terrain and what individual skiers are doing that sets themselves apart. (**Legacy**)

36ixty, a strategy-building group, has a formula for leading and leaving a meaningful legacy –

- Clarity
- Courage
- Commitment

Clarity is about knowing your strengths and applying them to setting the objective. For a leader, this focus is critical to moving the results needle. For example, Google now offers search engines in over 200 languages.

The media's ability to focus on specific demographics is a good example of clarity. Using well-known contestants, *Dancing With the Stars* has new fans tuning in every year. Though most of the broadcast is devoted to the contest – after all, keeping the audience and the judges happy are major components of how contestants win – the producers take the time to show rehearsals and other “behind the scenes” events.

For those leaders focused on increasing sales, this popular show offers an important lesson: the work that you do behind the scenes is every bit as important as the time spent in the spotlight. Legacy is, therefore, not based solely on what is visible. It means:

- A. Know what's working and what could be better;
- B. Focus on more than just what the company is doing now;
- C. Keep adding benefits to your products or services;
- D. Participate rather than just attend.

Remember our orchestra leader. The more you prepare, the better your performance will be. And this creates clarity.

“When it is right, it is music to my ears”

Leonard Bernstein

Courage is about risk. Understand we are not talking about “bet the company” decisions. It's more about leaving your comfort zone behind and looking at an opportunity with a fresh, new view. A leader's career path can be charted by past courage shown when looking for new opportunities.

For example, what happens if your firm/company loses its largest customer? Response to a setback should catalyze action, not cause paralysis. Your business should monitor and evaluate all such occasions where customers fall by the wayside to ensure that responsible parties jump back into action with a new action program.

The result will take courage to look for opportunity. Losses should pump the collective adrenaline. If an immediate and thought-out response becomes ingrained in your company's culture (**legacy**), the bottom line will actually improve at a reasonable point in time after every loss.

And **Commitment** is all about action. Identify those actions that matter because they produce results. Ultimately, leadership is measured by the value of results – your **legacy**. This is also part of the 4th Law of Leadership, Accountability. It all ties together.

We know about Google's incredible commitment to customer services and products as well as to the environment. But their legacy also continues by creating opportunities for internships and international

scholarships, non-profit grants, and even providing healthy food for their worldwide staff (which actually started from the company hiring its very first chef in 1999).

“Once a client, always a client”

Frank Mims V

In our work, “once a client, always a client” is the mantra. Building that long-term relationship and maintaining it is as much a part of your legacy as the internal organization you lead. Always give something more. It always pays in the long run to give your customers above and beyond what they expect.

When I left my first career as a city/county manager, departing from one of the largest counties in California, the local paper stated: “... the critical comments ignore Colman’s achievements. They have been considerable... accomplished in an especially difficult time... Colman must stand as the most influential administrative officer ever to direct Fresno County government.”

Persevere, even in the face of reversals. Never quit or say it can’t be done. This is your **legacy**.

“Your company is only as good as the people you keep”

Mary Kay Ash

We have gone from orchestra leaders to Prime Ministers, from Google to kings. And each in their own way has differentiated between leadership and exceptional leadership by actually and continually following the **6 LAWS OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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2. **Leaders Make Decisions**
3. **Leaders Communicate Decisions**
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6. **Leaders Leave a Legacy**

Let me conclude with an interview a reporter conducted with a bank president.

“Sir, what is the secret of success”

“Two words.”

“And what are they, sir?”

“Good decisions.”

“And how do you make good decisions?”

“One word.”

“And sir, what is that one word?”

“Experience.”

“And how do you get experience?”

“Two words.”

“And sir, what are those two words?”

“Bad decisions.”

NOW LEAD!

—Allan Colman