

The Key Ingredients For Leadership

A Conversation between
Nido R. Qubein, President, High Point University and John C. Maxwell



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EDITORS' NOTE Nido Qubein rose to prominence as an internationally known author and consultant who has given more than 7,500 presentations worldwide. He has served on the corporate boards of several Fortune 500 companies including Truist – the sixth-largest bank in the nation, La-Z-Boy, and Savista Healthcare. Qubein is also executive chairman of the Great Harvest Bread Company. Qubein became the seventh president of High Point University in January 2005. Since that time, enrollment has quadrupled, the campus has expanded from 90 to 520 acres, and academic schools have grown from three to fourteen. Among numerous honors and recognitions that he has received, Qubein is an inductee of the Horatio Alger Association for Distinguished Americans, along with Oprah Winfrey and Colin Powell. Qubein converses with some of the world's most influential thought leaders and change agents, many of whom are drawn to HPU's innovative campus. Their conversations focus on leadership, life skills and values that prepare HPU students to lead lives of success and significance. Below is a transcribed excerpt, edited for clarity and brevity, of Qubein's 2021 conversation with Dr. John C. Maxwell, a renowned leadership expert and coach who has sold nearly 40 million copies of his books on leadership and life.

Qubein: My goodness. Your influence has been felt from border to border, coast to coast, countries around the world. You have written so many books – 80 plus books – that sold almost 40 million copies. You've coached people. You've planted seeds of greatness everywhere you've been. And you began as a minister of a church in Indiana.

Maxwell: I did so with three people the first Sunday, and two of them were my wife, Margaret, and me. Honestly, it was an elderly lady named Maude who lived right beside the church. So, it was Maude, Margaret, and me the very first Sunday in a small church in Hillham, Indiana. People will say to me today, "You must love your life and love what you're doing," and I'll say, "Well, I do, but I loved what I was doing in southern Indiana with three people."

So many times, we get Destination Disease. We think we're going to be fulfilled out there and find the answer for us. But I think when you love what you do and you do what you love, it doesn't matter how big you are, how small you are - you just enjoy the journey. And I can honestly say that I've had a wonderful

journey, but it isn't like it's gotten wonderful in the last 10 years. It's been wonderful for 50 years.

Qubein: Then you built churches in California and Ohio, and these were mega-churches.

Maxwell: By the time I was 29, I had the 10th largest church in America. People would ask me how that happened, and I'd say, "Well, we worked hard." I didn't quite understand why they couldn't build a great church, and it took me about three years to really understand why. I realized I was a good leader, and when I saw how everything rises and falls on leadership, that was the moment when I wanted to give my life to helping people learn how to lead. If I can help people learn how to lead, no matter what profession they're in, I knew they were going to do better. Fifty years later, I believe that even more now than I did in the beginning.

Qubein: John, you've been named the number one leadership speaker in the world for a reason because you have indeed shown people how to lead. What is your definition of leadership?

Maxwell: I think leadership is just influence, and I think that we make it way too complicated. I think we want to attach position with it or title with it. You know, Mother Teresa was an incredible leader, a great influencer worldwide. But she never had a title. She worked in the slums of Calcutta.

As for me, I try to be a communicator. I take things complicated, make it simple and share it with people. When they ask me, "How do I increase my influence?", I say, "By intentionally adding value to people on a daily basis." The moment you begin to intentionally add value to people, they begin to influence you. I tell young people all the time, "If you really want to be a great leader, just start by intentionally adding value to people on a daily basis."

Qubein: If leadership is influence, not every leader is doing well.

Maxwell: Leadership at its best brings the best out of people. Leadership at its worst brings the worst out of people. And so, the rising of leadership is all about competence

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and values. When you show me a leader that is competent and has great values, they're going to rise, and people are going to rise with them.

Qubein: What would be the top three ingredients for a good leader to develop?

Maxwell: I think number one is humility, and that doesn't mean self-depreciation. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but is thinking of yourself less. That means you have the ability to get beyond yourself and really care for people and be interested in them, about who they are and what they do. And humility makes us teachable, and I think the core to growth is having a teachable spirit, always wanting to learn, always believing that everybody is your teacher, and every experience has something to teach you. The second ingredient for being a good leader is authenticity - just being real. I think success tends to create a gap between the successful person and the people, and that's one of the things I've never liked about success. So, how do you remove that gap? Well, you want friends, not fans. When you have fans, you have a tendency to show them what you think they want to see. But friends know who you really are.

Qubein: That's a really powerful point.

Maxwell: I think it is, too. The person who is successful has the responsibility to remove that gap and not allow people to be fans of yours, but to be friends of yours.

Qubein: How do you do that?

Maxwell: Well, you do that by caring and valuing people. You walk slowly through the

crowd to let people know that you care for them and that you value them. You do that by being very honest about not only what you do well, but about what you don't do well.

I tell people all the time that I have a few real gifts, but I'm really average in so many areas of my life. When I was 29 and pastored the 10th largest church in the country, I had a mentor who really helped me in this area. One Sunday after church, he took me to lunch. We had a three-hour lunch and he said to me something that just changed my life. He said, "John, you're highly gifted, but your gifts are greater than you. You're not amazing, John. I know you really well, and you've got some real faults."

Qubein: Did you ask him to leave the congregation at that point?

Maxwell: No, he was my mentor. I couldn't. In fact, I was afraid he was going to ask me to leave the congregation. But the point is that what he taught me that day was very important. He said, "When people say you're amazing, they're really confusing the giftedness that you have. You need to always understand that you have a gift, and it was God-given. God is amazing. He gave you the gift. But remember it's a gift. You didn't earn it, and you didn't deserve it. He just created you with a purpose and gave you that gift to really help and add value to people. Just be grateful to God that you have that gift."

Qubein: And that creates authenticity.

Maxwell: I think it does. When people say, "You're amazing," I tell them, "You saw me in my sweet spot. Come home with me and see me every day, and you won't think I'm too amazing at all."

Qubein: So, the three ingredients of leadership are authenticity, humility and the third?

Maxwell: Having great values. I'm passionate about a person embracing and living out good values because I feel that when people learn good values and they live with good values, they become a plus and an asset to everybody who's around them - family, community, whatever their work is. When they do things for the right reasons, they begin to really bless people. It's like they're better on the inside than they are on the outside.

Qubein: John, this is interesting. I asked you what are the three most important traits a leader should have, and you did not say skills or communication. You said humility, authenticity, and values. At some point, you have to say skills and competence and experience are important.

Maxwell: Yes. But when you have the inner part right, the skillset just begins to be enhanced. A skillset will allow you to go only so far. What sets people apart is that they have good skills, and they're competent and they use those skills for the right reasons. That's the difference maker, and that's what gets us out of what I call the "Talent Pile." There are a lot of talented people out there, but what is it that allows some people who are talented to have an influential life and others crash and burn? It wasn't a skill problem. It was an inner issue problem. They had the wrong values, they lacked humility, they thought they were more important than they really were. They lacked good values. I think if you're bigger on the inside, you will become bigger on the outside. ●

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