

What You Can't
Learn at
HARVARD
about
Leadership



*100+ Leadership Tips
Learned in the Trenches*

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Introduction

It's all about the people and it always will be, no matter what size or type business. People make a business thrive or merely survive. That is the challenge for many senior executives - learning to effectively deal with their people, in the short term and long range. This booklet has realistic tools to do that, in bite-sized pieces that support your success now and later. Regardless of leadership style or length of experience, these tips, based on thousands of hours of interviews and many years experience working with highly effective senior executives in the trenches, take you to the next level of accomplishment with your colleagues at all levels within your organization.

About the Author

Carl Robinson, Ph.D., is a business psychologist and executive coach who focuses on the development of high performance leaders. Dr. Robinson has over 25 years experience using research based, proven in the trenches, motivational and performance enhancement technologies to help individuals and organizations improve their effectiveness.

His clients come from various industries and organizations primarily centered on companies offering intellectually based products and services in highly competitive, volatile markets with people who are intelligent, creative, and usually impatient. He speaks nationally on topics related to leadership and effectiveness enhancement.

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EXECUTIVE CARE AND FEEDING

- 1 Focus on the results you achieve rather than on what you do. This is the best way to identify what true value you add. People pay attention to and pay for results.
- 2 Spend most of your time creating, leading, managing, developing relationships, and advising others. That's where you can showcase your true value and allow you to differentiate and stand head and shoulders above your competition.
- 3 Look at what you do that is unique and can not be easily commoditized or outsourced. Expanding on this expands your satisfaction and your company's satisfaction with you.
- 4 Learn how to delegate well. Offloading tasks to other people gives you more time and energy to devote to those things you do best.
- 5 Develop and expand your repertoire beyond a one-size-only leadership style. Consider that "charismatic" leadership can work well during times of perceived uncertainty or in the startup phase of a business. "Quiet" transactional leadership may work better when it is time to grow steadily, to become the best at what you do.
- 6 Be thoughtful and decisive. They are not mutually exclusive. Exceptional leaders make lots of decision, not all correct because no one can be correct 100 % of the time. Top performers just correct quickly.

7 Understand that successful executives are developed not hatched full grown. Develop your key people by following the guidelines of Assess, Plan, Take Action, Practice, Re-Assess, and Practice even more.

8 Get objective feedback about your own performance as a leader. Rarely do you see yourself as others do. Be actively involved in continuous self improvement as a top executive, like professional athletes are. Be a model for continuous improvement by doing it yourself.

9 Reach out for support. It's lonely at the top and having a couple trusted advisors or peers outside of your company who you can run things by will help you learn new tricks, see things from different perspectives and avoid costly errors that others not caught in the thick of it can see.

10 Use executive coaching as a way of developing and retaining high potential and star performers, including yourself. You get more bang for your buck by lifting good people to a higher level. You will also employ one of the most effective methods for retaining key employees by providing them with developmental opportunities. Great employees stay where they can learn and grow.



COMPANY PERFORMANCE MATTERS

11 Recognize that top leaders think and act strategically. That means that you have to both execute well and think far enough in advance to prepare for the future.

12 Conduct a thorough assessment of an entire situation rather than just of the "identified patient" or obvious causes when problems (symptoms) occur. Don't rush to treat the symptom. Consider a solution only after a thorough assessment is done.

13 Realize that human psychology will always influence the economy. This causes economic cycles by a natural inability to remain in a steady state of normalcy. You are part of a creative species, one who finds solutions. The upward swing creates innovations and wealth. The sobering plunge can help you be more realistic about what can and should be produced in what sequence and by what people.

14 Take appropriate risks and challenge the process in the low part of the economic cycle to be able to thrive as the economy improves. Notice examples of people around you who are doing that very thing. Taking prudent risks by leading puts you ahead of the pack when the economy builds up again.

15 Allow integrity, professionalism, and respect to guide your decision-making and behavior. Encourage everyone to be conscious of how they are acting and relating to each other and how they are making business decisions using integrity, professionalism, and mutual respect as a guiding force.

16 Pay attention to process. Encourage your people to raise their level of consciousness. Consider business practices. Look at how people relate to each other. Test new behaviors based on the guiding principles of integrity, professionalism, and respect.

17 Use parallel processing when possible. This means simultaneously doing the job and observing how you are doing so you can consciously make adjustments rather than only react after the fact. Think about what you are doing while you are doing.

18 Build trust in your company by disclosing bad news quickly and completely. Let all the appropriate parties know what is happening. Tell the truth and include what will be done to correct any problems.

19 Focus on the positive potential outcomes to a crisis and look for the pony buried in all the manure. Emphasize how each employee could use the particular experience, no matter how bad it is, to personally learn and grow.

20 Remember that leaders lead. During tough times is when you see who is really made of the "right stuff." Hunkering down" is the new buzz phrase. It is what followers do because they are strapped to the pendulum on its swing to the other side. There is a difference between belt tightening and hunkering down. Be prudent without hunkering down.

21 Develop your people regardless of the state of the economy. It takes more than hiring bright people and letting them loose to figure things out on their own. Trained managers lead more effectively, achieve better results, and have lower turnover of their best employees. Put time and money into developing your people. It will pay off.

22 Realize the number one reason people quit a job is, "I hate my boss." The best people will not tolerate a bad boss. They know they can find a new job and a better boss elsewhere even when times are tough. Those who stay behind with bad bosses are usually your least skilled and least productive people or who are most afraid. That is hardly a recipe for building a successful company.

23 Improve your "emotional intelligence" (EQ). Emotional intelligence is the capacity to manage yourself and your relationships effectively. It consists of four fundamental capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill."

24 Achieve better bottom line results and be a better leader through improved emotional intelligence. The best leaders respond with clearer, more rational minds and make better decisions under pressure. Effective leaders use varying leadership styles according to the business situation and the people they manage. They customize their leadership approach.



GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS

25 Hire well. Realize your employees' attitude makes or breaks your business. Relationship building is the key to success in any business. Repeat business means you must connect with your customers. Your customers are more likely to come back when they feel appreciated and when your employees connect with them.

26 Select from within whenever possible. It is risky to put someone in an executive position without knowing the business or the people involved. Being a successful 'professional manager' is not usually enough. It usually takes an outsider six months or more to get up to speed in a large organization even when the executive is a domain or subject matter expert.

27 Be systematic in your top management recruitment process. Picking the right people should be your primary concern. Plan and prepare what your approach will be.

28 Choose people who are interpersonally adept. Being smart and technically qualified isn't enough. Be sure the person has both the competencies necessary for the job and is the right personality fit. Competency is the easier of the two to find.

29 Select the interview team. Ensure that everyone who will interview the candidate has been trained on the learned skill of interviewing techniques. Decide who will ask the candidate what questions. Divide the questions based on interviewer competency. Let finance people ask the finance questions.

30 Develop a role expectations description based on criteria that everyone agrees upon. It's important to have all the interviewers agreeing about requirements. If one person thinks a certain personality type is needed while another thinks differently they will be cross-wise when comparing evaluations.

31 Pose behavioral, open-ended questions based on position requirements to guard against "would do" vs. "have done." When asking candidates "can you do x?" 9 times out of 10 they will say yes because they think they can. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

32 Prepare interview questions in advance. Take notes so you won't forget what was said. You will either forget what the first interviewee said or mix their responses with

subsequent interviewees without taking notes. Ask each candidate the same questions so you can compare answers and more accurately and more scientifically compare candidates.

33 Ask a candidate how they handled dealing with some particular situation. Explore how they were creative in the past when you are looking for "creative," "out-of-the-box" types. They will likely continue to be creative in the right circumstances if they have been creative in the past. Provide a healthy work environment or even the most creative person will wither.

34 Make the candidates feel comfortable. They reveal more when they aren't on guard. Making the interview feel like an interrogation tells you how they respond to questioning under pressure. It's unlikely they'll reveal much about themselves in that situation because they will be on the defensive. Interrogate away if you want to hire tough defensive people. Otherwise help them feel relaxed.

35 Allow enough time in the interview for the candidate to ask questions. The number and caliber of their questions tells you a lot about how they think. Sell the candidate on the job and company without overselling or talking more than 20% of the interview time. Let them tell their story.

36 Pace yourself with your hiring decisions. Making a hiring decision based on the first interview is usually not the best decision you can make. Take your time. Compare candidates.

37 Do extensive reference checking of a minimum of 6 people using prepared behavioral questions to verify "have done vs. will do." Make sure the candidate has actually done what they say they have. Be very careful not to fall for the halo effect selection bias error at the CEO level. The halo effect includes the influence of reading about the candidate in the press or seeing them on television.

38 Use scientifically validated and sophisticated pre-employment assessment tools. When used appropriately with the proper training, assessment instruments designed for selection helps pick top talent who is well matched to your company.

39 Treat candidates respectfully. They will remember how you treated them whether you hire them or not. They may refer to you a top-flight candidate and save you big recruiting bucks. They might choose or not choose to become a customer some day depending on how you treated them. Your interviewee might also be your interviewer some day.

40 Be confident about your company's future even with blemishes. Prospective employees will self select into companies based on the challenge and opportunities most congruent with their personality. Some people like startups, some prefer more mature "secure" companies, and some people love turn-a-rounds. Truth in packaging helps ensure the proper fit between employee and work environment. Top employees select the company that fits them best.



TEAMS THAT WORK

41 Focus on self improvement. Set the standard that every team member is responsible for being a leader. Teams work better where team members take responsibility for improving their own personal performance.

42 Establish a clear and compelling direction as the team leader. Each member will promote their own personal interests when team members cannot see where your team is going. The collective energy and creativity of your team will achieve amazing results when they are challenged to do their best work together.

43 Create an appropriate structure. This includes setting the team size and boundaries, establishing its procedures and spelling out the norms of conduct for the team. The best size team is 6 to 8 members.

44 Select the right people. The best people on your teams contribute the ability to work well with others. Empathy and integrity are the two attributes distinguishing top team members from those serving on less capable teams.

45 Replace anyone from your team who is not willing or able to demonstrate empathy, mutual respect, and the ability to listen to others' views without interrupting. These are necessary norms of conduct required for top teams.

46 Recognize a person with integrity as someone who behaves consistently with the organization's or team's values, even when it is personally risky to do so. Trusting each other is the fuel for top teams. Trust promotes creative and cooperative endeavors rather than unproductive protective behaviors.

47 Support your team. Provide sound data, forecasts, training, and rewards. Set compensation that is appropriate, and encourage top team members to buy into the team-set goals. This delivers a strong message about what a company values. Effective compensation structures can also be a powerful tool for motivating team members to achieve team goals.

48 Provide developmental guidance. Periodically review your team's performance. Hold meetings to discuss how the team is doing, what it is doing best, and what it is doing poorly, and what it and its members have learned. Providing individual coaching to team members increases the overall performance of your team.

49 Tell the truth, especially when you are in the wrong. It is the best way to create a bond with your people. They will be more willing to work with you.

50 Communicate more when things are going wrong. Hiding makes things worse. Many people understand human errors and are pretty forgiving. Keep communication open by telling what you are doing to correct any problems. This helps people remain calm, be patient, and think the best of you.



EMPLOYEES AT THE HEART OF IT

51 Give employees honest feedback about their performance. Waiting for once a year performance reviews does them and your company a disservice. They need more frequent feedback. Your best employees want to know what they need to do to be seen as a top performer. Move those who don't want honest feedback off your team.

52 Be decisive with personnel issues. Let someone go as soon as you make your decision. It is better to move on than prolong your misery and theirs once you have given someone a chance to improve and they haven't.

53 Ask your direct reports, "What's the best way to manage you so that you can be successful?" They will tell you what they need. This is so much easier than attempting mind reading. Everyone's needs are slightly different.

54 Tell your direct reports how to effectively manage you. Your top performers will effectively manage up which should not be confused with sucking up. Tell them how you like best to be communicated with and what you need from them to feel comfortable about their performance. This keeps you from being tempted to micromanage them in a misguided attempt to calm your anxieties.

55 Inspire confidence with a clear vision, a workable plan, and the competence to achieve it. The first ingredient of trust is competence. People follow someone they feel is competent. Articulate your vision, provide a workable plan, and then execute.

56 Back up words with actions. You will engender cynicism and disengagement when you don't follow through with your commitments.

57 Respect your employees. Treat your employees well if you want your customers to be treated well. Most people want to do right by each other.

58 Assume positive intent when dealing with personnel problems or you'll set the person up for failure. They will never be able to overcome your prejudice once they fail.

59 Explain the repercussions of their actions. Make your explanation as clear as possible without assuming they can connect the dots. Provide specific examples in detail as a strong foundation for changing a person's behavior.

60 Assign a "change partner." Have the person in need of developmental help team up with someone who is more "interpersonally adept." Choose someone who can provide real time observations and suggestions and serves as a good role model.

61 Monitor performance and reward successive approximations to the desired behavior. Do this along the way instead of waiting to provide a reward when they hit the target. The person will inch closer to the target when given useful feedback and encouragement.

62 Move the person out of a leadership role if they don't attempt to change or simply aren't able to learn after repeated coaching. Make six months the maximum probationary time. The cost to you and your employee's morale will be too significant by waiting any longer. Their so-called productivity or creativity will most likely not offset the toll they will take.



MOTIVATION KEEPS IT MOVING

63 Lead by example. Act quickly to stop behaviors that breakdown trust and collaboration. Your employees become energized and want to follow in your footsteps when they know they have your respect. Generate and sustain trust as the key ingredient in becoming a top level motivator.

64 Have the right people on the bus. That includes people who don't need to be actively managed. It also means your being self confident enough to hire people who may be smarter than you. Then your primary task will be helping them do their job rather than motivating them.

65 Enable others to act. The more successful an executive you are, the more humble you probably are. Promote collaboration through relationships and supporting personal development.

66 Prepare successors for success. Give your subordinates plenty of developmental help through training and coaching. Allow your people to shine. Notice and celebrate your followers' contributions and achievements.

67 Search for opportunities. Ask how something can be done better. Doing the same thing over and over may be safe. It doesn't motivate people very much and gets boring.

68 Learn from mistakes. See each experience of yours and your team as an opportunity to learn, to do it better the next time. Develop core interpersonal skills and competencies. Become a lifelong learner of people and processes.

69 Stay open to new or different ideas. You do not have to like or accept every new idea. Exploring and examining different ways of doing things keeps you and the people around you alive, interested, and interesting.

70 Be accountable to yourself and your team. Do what you say when you say you will to the best of your ability. Expect the same from your people. Minimize excessive defensiveness by remaining as open to suggestions and other perspectives as possible.

71 Apologize when you make a mistake or cause a problem. That simple apology paves the way for positive future dealings which can reward you and your team many times over. Self-assured people are able to acknowledge their mistakes

72 Say you are wrong when it's clear that you are. There may be a lot of evidence to support you made a mistake. Admit it and move on.

73 Take initiative as a leader. Be willing to experiment. Test your assumptions, refine, and start again.



CREATIVITY AT ITS FINEST

74 Defer judgment when looking for new and creative ideas and solutions. Deferring judgment keeps creative juices flowing. The moment you say "dumb idea," to yourself or your team is the moment your mind or your team stops producing those so-called dumb ideas. You will scare people into silence and stifle their creativity by critiquing their ideas too soon and too harshly.

75 Generate as many ideas as possible to fill the well. The more ideas, the better the odds of finding something novel that works. Most of your ideas will end up on the cutting room floor. All it takes is one or two good ones. A quantity of ideas is the hallmark of creativity. Very creative people produce lots of ideas. The ideas then become refined and selected as appropriate.

76 List ideas when they occur to you. Keep a written record. Creative ideas are flighty. They can disappear the moment you get distracted by the routines and distractions of the day. Creative ideas don't often look like they're creative until combined with other, often dissimilar, ones.

77 Mix, match, reshuffle, and recombine ideas to see what comes out at the end. Having different work groups like marketing and finance review ideas produced by the other group often generates different and unpredictable connections or expansions that are creative ideas.

78 Allow your subconscious to generate ideas by incubating their subject. Your best ideas may come to you while taking your morning shower. Good ideas need time to incubate. Your subconscious mind is constantly working and cannot be forced to produce on your schedule.

79 Work on a problem, generate ideas, then walk away and do something completely different. Take a walk, go to a show, sculpt, paint, sing; visit an art gallery, play ball, play with your kids. Then return to thinking about the problem and see what new ideas emerge. Wait to decide which ideas are worth pursuing until you've generated lots of ideas no matter how stupid or unrelated to the problem they may seem.

80 Listen, consider, and evaluate new ideas when working through avoidance of change. Ask yourself if you are resistant because you are afraid or because you think it is really a bad idea.

81 Monitor your exuberance as an executive. Chiming in too soon with your ideas and solutions can stop further discussions and disempower others. Tap into other people's brilliance by encouraging input and discussion while being patient during the process.

82 Minimize excessive competitiveness or a "me first" mentality. Give credit where credit is due. This is far superior to fueling an organization whose executives look out primarily for their own turf and squelch creativity. Support the essential cross-fertilization of ideas found in highly creative environments.

83 Allow people to manage themselves rather than micromanaging them every step of the way: Micromanaging prompts an oppressive sense of constriction which discourages originality. Trust your people to do what they do well. Give them the space and time to be creative without hovering over them. Smart, creative people need to be trusted.

84 Have realistic deadlines. Strike a balance between a too-intense schedule that stifles creativity and goals that can help focus attention.

85 Confront any 'yes-but' person in your group as quickly as possible to stop their behavior. Otherwise the energy of the entire group quickly becomes depleted and brings all creativity to a grinding halt.



CONFLICT STRATEGIES FOR SENIOR TEAMS

86 Learn to manage conflict rather than avoid it. Creative solutions come from tolerating and constructively managing civilized disagreements.

87 Be proactive. Head off problems before they snowball. Ask your peers or subordinates, "How are we doing? What can I do to improve the effectiveness of our relationship?"

88 Be aware of unintentionally feeding conflict between executives. Encourage and insist on direct dealings between an executive and their peers to warrant being on an executive team. Coming to you must be the last resort.

89 Deal directly. Leave out a third-party mediator to resolve the situation. This is called triangulation. Triangulation is an attempt to avoid responsibility by using the third party to handle an issue that needs to be resolved head-on between two people. Triangulating keeps people from resolving issues amongst themselves.

90 Create team alignment for peak performance in four specific areas. These include strategic and operational goals; team members' roles and responsibilities; ground rules for group behavior; and personal styles of interaction.

91 Hold a formal session with your team about alignment. Determine your people's clarity about their role and accountability on the team and in the organization. Provide any necessary information needed to remove ambiguity.

92 Identify who has decision making authority. This helps reduce conflict or at least allows people to say with authority, "This is my call."

93 Establish procedures for resolving conflicts in advance. In truly creative settings, conflict is inevitable and necessary so plan for effectively managing conflict. Think of the procedures as ground rules for behavior within and outside the team. These are key elements in the conflict-management process.

94 Handle disagreements on your own as well as possible. Do this without recruiting supporters to your point of view. Keep a private disagreement private.

95 Resolve it or let it go. The longer conflict remains unresolved, the greater the chance that it will grow, spreading negativity throughout the team and often throughout the organization. Set a time limit to resolve the issues. If it cannot be resolved by the deadline, the issue must drop and the people involved must move on.

96 Discuss the issue only when those involved are present. Stop discussion immediately if someone brings up an issue that involves another team member not at the meeting. The team owes it to the missing team member to postpone further debate until he or she can be present.

97 Develop the capability to understand and respond to differing personality styles. People respond best when they feel they are understood.



PERSUADING AND SELLING TO OTHER LEADERS

98 Relate to CEOs and senior executives as a peer. You'll be dismissed, figuratively and literally, when you don't see yourself as a peer.

99 Understand that peers have conversations. They don't do presentations. The moment you walk into a senior executive's office and pull out your laptop PowerPoint or nifty looking presentation folder you've become another vendor hawking your wares. Presentations break down the interpersonal connection unless you represent a company involved in visual media.

100 Develop a relationship where the executive sees you as someone who can understand and help them. Connect on the interpersonal level with your prospect; otherwise your competitor who does relate will win the sale.

101 Take more control of the conversation by asking questions about the prospect's needs. Provide relevant examples of how you've helped other clients solve similar problems. Focus on results achieved instead of content or processes. Relevant examples prove your capabilities. Reciting a list of services doesn't.

102 Ask the prospect about themselves and their needs as a way around the invitation to tell them about yourself or your company. Give only a very brief overview. Ask why they were interested in meeting with you. That provides you material to relevantly respond and start a peer-to-peer conversation.

103 Know your stuff. Practice so you can discuss and respond in a relaxed and confident manner. Practice until you can answer questions spontaneously about your company and services. Become light on your feet.

104 Become conversant in current events and other topics beyond business or sports. Developing a business relationship takes more than just talking business. Those conversations support long lasting, thriving relationships on numerous levels.

105 Anticipate every possible objection. Reply with well rehearsed, succinct, proven in the trenches answers. Objections are a predictable part of the territory and indicate the prospect is engaged.

106 Acknowledge and validate the prospect's concerns. Do this without making a big deal out of it by over defending or over selling.

107 Keep track of the time. Be the one to gracefully end the conversation instead of making your prospect tell you it's time to wrap it up.

118 Enjoy whatever family you have. Spend more time with your kids if you have children. They are a gift. You'll naturally loosen up by playing with your kids. A loose (versus uptight) mind thinks more creatively. Children help you see the world with new eyes when you let them.

119 Develop and nurture friendships with people outside of work. Develop friendships with people with whom you can let down your hair and you don't have to worry about impressing.

120 Explore your spiritual relationship. Explore how you fit into the bigger scheme of things. Explore without expecting to find "the answer."

121 Have fun at work. You would not want to work for a bore or a grouch. Neither do your colleagues. You are doing something wrong if work is no fun.

122 Take a vacation. You need a break from your work. You do no one any good by working for more than a year straight. Hire the right people, delegate tasks to them, and realize your business should run for a short time without you, or you haven't been doing your job as a manager and leader.

123 Learn to say "yes." Say "yes" to your life and to the opportunities you are presented. "Seize the day!"

124 Notice that the best executives, the ones that are admired, are gracious. They treat everyone they meet with respect. What goes around comes around.