

The Big Picture



Doing-Managing-Leading-Teaching

I believe there are four stages in the professional trajectories for most talented individuals:

- Doing can range from the elementary (rote assembly-line work) to the incredibly complex (brain surgery). It involves accomplishing a specific, clearly delineated task. Mastering a task can take from minutes of training to decades of learning.
- Managing is getting something done that would not have occurred without you.³ It is causing *others* to accomplish tasks. Think of management as the plural of doing.
- Leading is taking a group of people to a place where they would not have gotten to without you.⁴ That “place” can be anything from a geographic location to an entirely new organization. Without the leader, the followers would not have reached that “place,” no matter how hardworking and brilliant.

³ *11 Questions Great Managers Ask & Answer*, my second book

⁴ *7 Roles Great Leaders Don't Delegate*, my first book

- Teaching is sharing your hard-earned knowledge about doing, managing, and leading with others. Using a sports metaphor, it's when you go from playing on the frontlines to coaching on the sidelines. It's when you go from leader to elder.⁵

Transitioning

Almost all of us have something we are good at doing, usually preceded or accompanied by significant training or education. For example, my wife is a physician, and I trained as an electrical engineer.

Sooner or later, most of us grow beyond a specific skill to management and/or leadership.

You do not have to become a manager. Many doers are not, and never want to be, managers.

You do not have to have experience as a manager to be a leader. Many great leaders are not managers.

You do not have to become a leader. Many managers are not, and never want to be, leaders.

But the most effective of those who have transcended doing are both leaders and managers. Most have become great managers first and then great leaders.

The purpose of this book is to help managers transform themselves into leaders by listing and discussing powerful, time-tested ideas encapsulated in simple, easy-to-remember, and catchy sayings.

Organizing the 23 Truths

The longer I looked at the 23 truths, the more I realized that these wise sayings could be categorized into six broad themes. So I used a single word, an action verb, to describe the six categories of wisdoms that will help you transition from doer to manager to leader.

5 It's the stage I find myself in, and the reason I wrote this and my previous two books.

Focusing

Leaders must have a much broader perspective than managers, but since they have a wider field of view, they also have to selectively focus more than managers. I found these three aphorisms most useful to help me focus as I transitioned from doer to manager to leader:

- ✓ If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.
- ✓ Make the main thing the main thing.
- ✓ What you see depends on where you stand.

Leading

There are thousands of books and ideas that describe leadership. These three simple, easy-to-remember sayings have helped me define my leadership style and helped me make the transition from doer to manager to leader:

- ✓ The buck stops here.
- ✓ Lead from the front.
- ✓ May the force be with you.

Actioning

As managers transition to leaders, they have to learn a more proactive approach to taking action. These five time-tested maxims helped me formulate my actions as I transitioned from doer to manager to leader.

- ✓ What are you going to do differently on Monday?
- ✓ Improvise, adapt, and overcome.
- ✓ Plans are nothing. Planning is everything.
- ✓ It is better to sweat in peace than bleed in war.
- ✓ Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

Philosophizing

Leaders need a philosophical basis for how they think. These seven wise thoughts, passed down for generations, are what helped me keep my head straight as I transitioned from doer to manager to leader:

- ✓ Do what you can, with what you have, where you are at.
- ✓ Nothing hard is ever easy.
- ✓ What's the right thing to do here?
- ✓ Life is tough, but it's tougher if you're not smart.
- ✓ KISS—keep it simple & short.
- ✓ Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.
- ✓ Everything is connected to everything else.

Learning

Transitioning yourself from doer to manager to leader requires active learning. These three precepts were most helpful:

- ✓ Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.
- ✓ Make mistakes. Learn from them. Move on.
- ✓ Listen.

Caring

Finally, the farther up the doing-managing-leading continuum you move, the more you must care for your team and, more importantly, yourself. These two maxims embodied what matters most about caring:

- ✓ Leaders eat last.
- ✓ Life is short, eat dessert first.

And there you have the big picture: 23 great ideas grouped into six categories that light the way for anyone transitioning from doing to managing to leading.

Context for the 23 Truths

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Why do you call them “truths”?

There are a number of labels that could define the 23:

- ✓ aphorisms, described as “a pithy observation that contains a general truth,” or
- ✓ wisdoms, a grammatically incorrect neologism that pluralizes wisdom, or
- ✓ maxims, or
- ✓ precepts, or
- ✓ sayings, or
- ✓ truths.

While all six labels are essentially interchangeable, I settled on “truths” as the easiest to understand, least grammatically offensive, and most in touch with the fundamental nature of the 23.

What are the characteristics of these phrases?

Whatever we call them, the 23 all share several characteristics:

- ✓ they are short,
- ✓ they are catchy,
- ✓ they are easy to remember,
- ✓ they capture an essential leadership idea.

In many cases, they have famous authors.

In several cases, they have been attributed to multiple originators.

Why 23?

When I first jotted down the ideas that would become this book, there were 23 sayings that I liked and used, and frequently repeated out loud.

From the thousands of leadership sayings, wisdoms, truths, maxims, and aphorisms, I had picked the 23 that were most relevant to my journey from doing to managing to leading.

The 23 truths are the DNA for your transition from doer to manager to leader

There was nothing magical about my choice of the ninth prime number. It seemed like a nice balance of not enough and not too much.

But after choosing to limit my universe of truths to 23, the DNA metaphor struck me. There are 23 chromosomes in the human DNA⁶—so think of the 23 truths as the DNA for your transition from doer to manager to leader.

6 For those like me who bailed on Biology 101 in college, the 23 strands of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), coiled in the iconic double-helix, carry the genetic instructions for the development, functioning, growth, and reproduction of all known organisms and many viruses. It is literally the blueprint for life.

A final word before we start

These are absolutely not the only 23 truths, wisdoms, maxims, aphorisms, or sayings that will help you transform yourself into a leader.

I encourage you to add to or subtract from these 23. But create for yourself a menu of wisdoms—the stars you steer by—for the daily work of leadership.