

SUMMARY

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THE LEADER HABIT

BY MARTIN LANIK



Summary of The Leader Habit by Martin Lanik

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Learn how to form habits that will make you an
effective leader.

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Introduction

Leadership: we hear about it all the time. From our earliest days in elementary school, we have “line leaders” and “pencil monitors,” and we quickly learn that power is awarded to those who show initiative and take charge. As we get older, the pressure to be a leader intensifies. Professional workshops prioritize “leadership skills” and college applications call for us to identify the ways in which we have led at school, at home, and in the community. But what do you do if you don’t identify as a leader? What if you’re shy or nervous or prefer to stay out of the spotlight? What if you feel like you just don’t have what it takes to be a leader?

The author observes that many people feel this way. In fact, many people assume that leaders are born rather than made; either you’re born with leadership skills or you simply don’t have them. But what if that isn’t exactly true? What if it’s possible to learn everything you need to know to be an effective leader? The author believes that this is absolutely possible and that learning leadership is actually a life-long process. So, over the course of this summary, we’ll take an in-depth look at his top tips for forming habits that will help you develop crucial leadership skills.



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Why the “Natural Born Leader” Isn’t Really a Thing

As we discussed in the introduction, the concept of the “born leader” is pervasive in our society. News stories and TED Talks are teeming with stories of “naturally gifted leaders” who seem to affect change just by being themselves. But this theory is at odds with the overwhelming amount of self-help books and professional development seminars that claim they can make you a better leader. Given the pervasive myth of the natural born leader, one might wonder, “If leaders are born rather than made, what’s the point of trying?” In fact, it is this exact question that dismantles the theory of the natural born leader. Because even if their advice is fake and completely fabricated in order to sell books, every self-help guru who preaches the development of leadership skills has to believe that people can learn to become leaders. Or at least, they must believe that **you** will believe that. This is one key argument that disables the pervasive “born leader” theory.

But another good point to consider is this: if every leader arrives in the world with those innate leadership qualities, why aren’t we seeing a shocking uptick in new generations of leaders? Why aren’t more people changing the world and driving the self-help industry out of business? Could it possibly be that there really is no such thing as a “natural born leader?” Could it be that what we have instead are generations of people handicapped by the belief that they are not equipped to lead? The author argues that this is absolutely the case.

Sure, it’s true that some people are born with more naturally assertive personalities and that those qualities are well suited for a leadership role. But it’s not an “either/or” situation! Even if you aren’t a “take charge” kind of person, the truth is that leadership is much more than telling people what to do. And those qualities can be cultivated and developed, no matter what type of personality you have. So, how do you learn leadership? Well, the best way to start is by conducting an internal examination of yourself. Spend some time in quiet reflection and ask yourself: Who am I really? How do I make a difference? Another important question is one that you often see on college

applications: What challenges have you faced? How did you handle them? How do you respond when confronted with conflict?

These five questions will help you better understand yourself. They will also help you to take stock of the leadership skills that you have at your disposal. And the best part is that everyone has these skills inside of them! You just have to identify them and put them to work. Once you've answered these questions, you might find it helpful to write them down. The act of writing something down helps us to solidify thoughts and retain information. So, once you put your answers down on paper, you'll have a physical list that you can use as a reminder any time you need reassurance about yourself and your leadership skills. This reminder can also help you to focus on what's really important.

This is especially helpful because it's easy to get lost in the deluge of mixed messages about leadership. For example, many people think that leadership is about telling everybody else what to do or about being in a position of power. You might also cling to the mistaken assumption that every leader is supposed to act a certain way or embody a certain set of qualities. But all of these ideas are incorrect! That's why it's good to identify what makes you a good leader and to keep that reminder with you at all times. You can also start each day anew by tailoring the questions you ask yourself to fit each day. After all, every day brings a new set of tasks, goals, and responsibilities, so ask yourself what you can bring to the table in each day's unique scenario. Identify your goals for the day and remember that, above all, you should never stop learning. A good leader knows that leadership is all about learning and improvement. They also know that that process is a life-long, never-ending cycle. So, work constantly on self-improvement and refresh your questions so they reflect your goals for the day!



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Habits and How we Form Them

So, now that we've established that anyone can become a leader, let's take a look at the steps you can take to develop leader habits. We'll start by examining the qualities that define a successful leader. The author observes that, no matter what industry you work in, leadership skills are fairly universal and they translate across multiple different types of jobs and skill-sets. For example, if you're a cybercrime detective or an art history teacher, you would need a skill-set that is very specific and unique to that job. An art history teacher would know many things that a cybercrime detective would not and vice versa. But whether you were attempting to teach a class or lead a team of detectives, in each role, you would need strong communication skills and good interpersonal skills.

That's why the author believes that the most effective qualities of any leader can be divided into two basic categories: Getting Things Done and Focusing on People. These are umbrella terms which house a multitude of different skills, but if you want to simplify the core ingredients of strong leadership skills, these are the two main ingredients you want to focus on. For example, under the broad category of "Getting Things Done," the author identified several other core skills such as "Planning and Execution, Managing Priorities, Planning and Organizing, Delegating, and Creating a Sense of Urgency." All of these are leadership skills that help you to accomplish the overarching task "Getting Things Done."

But identifying those skills isn't the same as acquiring them. If you want to actually put those skills into practice, then it's important to learn about the micro-habits that help you build each and every one of those skills. The author believes that, if you work at cultivating small patterns of behavior one step at a time, you can ultimately train yourself to develop the necessary skills. So, let's take a look at that process and how it works. We'll start by looking at habits. Habits are something that everyone has but few people actually think about. In fact, we give our habits so little thought that we often fail to recognize when we've formed habits that guide our daily lives! For

example, let's consider something you probably never think about: the instincts that motivate you to perform certain actions.

Let's say that you're running out the door and you forgot your keys. You call out, "Has anybody seen my keys?" and your daughter picks them up off the kitchen counter before tossing them to you. She doesn't say, "Okay, I'm going to throw these keys-- you better catch them!" But when you see her arm winding up for a toss, what's your first instinct? Of course, you simply reach up and catch them, right? And you probably don't even think about it as you're doing so; your arms simply reach out without conscious thought. That's because what you're doing is a habit, a learned behavior that's been ingrained in you through years of catching things. Because that's exactly how habits are formed: they occur when an action is repeated so many times that you can instinctively do it without consciously thinking through the motions. Habits are therefore characterized by two factors-- automaticity, which, put simply, means you do it automatically-- and emotionlessness, because repetition decreases your enthusiasm for an action.

This makes a lot of sense if you think about your morning routine, because it probably doesn't conjure up a lot of strong feelings for you. If you're especially fond of structure and routine, you might feel agitated or out of place if your routine is interrupted, but you probably don't wake up and say, "Wow, I'm so excited to brush my teeth this morning!" Likewise, your habits are also defined by context because of the associations you form between your habits and your behavior. For example, if, as a student, you enjoyed the freedom of having few obligations and the ability to drink heavily every time you went out with your friends, as an adult, you might associate drinking with socialization and thus, crave a beer (or five) every time you get together with friends. Never mind the fact that your friends, your circumstances, and your tolerance for alcohol has probably changed through the years; your subconscious mind remembers the pleasurable association of friends and alcohol.

So, this information helps us understand more about the automatic nature of habits and how our habits can affect us. But how are habits actually

formed? Let's take a closer look. For starters, habits are partly formed by intentions. If, for example, you'd like to have whiter teeth, you might make a conscious decision to start regularly brushing your teeth. But habits are also formed by explaining random past behavior through adding an intention later on. For example, if you always sit on the same bar stool in your friend's kitchen when you visit her because it's the only free spot, with the passage of time, you might forget this and think that you always sit there because it's a nice and comfy spot. From then on, you might make a conscious choice to sit in that spot because you believe you have a good reason for doing so. One way or another, this behavior will ultimately lead to the formation of a habit. And lastly, habits can also be formed when you combine the intention and explanation behind your choices. For example, maybe you first started drinking coffee in college to help you get through all-nighters or to give you a boost of energy for getting to class. In this case, you made the conscious choice to drink coffee first thing in the morning. But years later, once your initial purpose for drinking coffee has long ceased, you continue to drink coffee before you do anything else in the morning and you do so without even thinking about it.

All of these examples can help us understand the logic and practice behind the formation of our habits. But now that we've learned about how habits are formed and how they impact our lives, we'll use the next chapter to explore the conscious formation of habits and what you can do to cultivate good habits in your life.



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How to Develop Leader Habits

In the previous chapter, we affirmed that habits are learned behaviors which become instinctive through repetition. But if it's true that habits are formed without thinking, how is it possible to actively build positive habits? In this chapter, we'll learn more about how to consciously cultivate the habits you want. For starters, let's think about how long it takes to form a habit. Of course, we know that habits aren't formed overnight, but how long do you think it really takes for a habit to form? The popular philosophy behind habit formation says that it takes only 21 days for a habit to become an automatic part of your daily life, routine, and mindset.

But a new study from University College London has debunked this philosophy by asserting that it actually takes a little more than two months to form a habit! That means habit formation actually takes about 66 days! So, if you wanted to form all of the micro-habits we discussed in the previous chapter, at the rate of 66 days per habit, that could take years! Fortunately, there's a type of shortcut. It's called a "Keystone Habit" and it's a term that was coined by Charles Duhigg in his famous self-help book *The Power of Habit*. Here's how Keystone Habits work: put simply, Keystone Habits are small gateways to accomplishing bigger goals. Personal development author Louis Chew has written a great deal about his personal experience with implementing Duhigg's habit theory and he explains the power of keystone habits by affirming that:

"Instead of focusing on step 1, you should focus on step 0. In other words, start with the smallest change possible. You should pick something that is small. You don't want to do something that is big. For example, if you are used to waking up at 7 am, waking up at 5 am is a big leap. So I might set an alarm clock for 15 minutes earlier than I usually do. 15 minutes is very doable. As you get more accustomed to waking up early, set the alarm another 15 minutes earlier. Eventually, over the course of a week or two, you will reach your two hour goal. Of course, you'll also need to start going to bed earlier, but that's something you can also do gradually as you progress."

In this example, we can identify two key things: your goal-- to get up earlier-- and the Keystone Habit you are forming to ultimately accomplish that goal. If your goal is to get up at 5:00 am so you can be more productive and make better use of your time, then getting up 15 minutes earlier each day is a great Keystone Habit you can form. This process can be repeated with any habit, especially the ones from the author's list of core leadership skills! For example, if your ultimate goal is "Getting Things Done," you could start by implementing smaller steps like "Managing Priorities." As you slowly work your way up to accomplishing that goal, your new ability to manage your priorities will enable you to get things done! You can repeat this process over and over with new goals and habits to quickly and efficiently form leader habits.



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Final Summary

Our society likes to perpetuate the myth that leaders are born not made. But the author asserts that this is a falsehood which can leave you unnecessarily handicapped. So, if you want to be a leader, all you have to do is become one! Start by debunking this toxic stereotype and then dive in to forming your leadership habits! The author believes that all core leadership qualities can be summarized by two categories: Focusing on People and Getting Things Done. Many skills fall under this broad umbrella and you can use Keystone Habits to acquire all of them. Just remember to start small and cultivate tiny, positive habits that will enable you to work your way up to your goal.



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