



Excerpts from

Leaders Eat Last

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What Companies Can Do

LEADERS EAT LAST outlines a philosophy and strategy to lead, build trust and inspire our people to take care of and support each other. The specific ideas and tactics I offer here pick up from where chapter 24 left off and address the specific challenges Millennials face. In practice, most are good, general leadership concepts that will help everyone in an organization grow.

Keep Conference Rooms Free of Cell Phones

It seems like something small and insignificant. The same can be said for brushing our teeth for two minutes. It is useless unless we do it consistently. Every time we interact with each other at work it is an opportunity to connect as human beings and slowly build trusting relationships. When we are on our phones before meetings, we take away opportunities to simply chat. Whether we talk about work, ask about each other's weekends . . . or even sit in silence together . . . we are doing little things that go a long way over time. If companies simply ban cellphones in all conference rooms, in time they will start to feel improvements in the quality of relationships their people enjoy.

Encourage Notetaking on Paper Instead of Computers

According to a study published in *Psychological Science*, those who take notes on paper are better at processing and retaining information. Though computer note takers may capture more data, those who use paper are forced to discern which information is more important. This learnable, practicable skill significantly impacts critical thinking and decision making. And for those who *have to have* notes captured digitally, then assign one person to take digital notes or simply transcribe the handwritten notes after the meeting.

Teach Leadership

I visited a large bank and asked if they had a leadership training program. “We do,” the executive answered excitedly. When I probed for specific courses they teach, I was told they teach compliance. “That’s not leadership training,” I said, “that’s how to follow the law.” He continued to share more of the courses on offer, but there wasn’t a single class on actual leadership. How can we expect people to lead if we don’t teach them how to do it? The best companies I know have a robust curriculum to include human skills like effective confrontation, active listening and communication skills.

Teach How to Give and Receive Feedback

Many Millennials in the workforce say they want more feedback. In practice, I’ve learned that what they seem to want is more positive feedback, more affirmation when they do well. Stories abound that too many of them aren’t actually that good at receiving negative feedback. Giving and receiving feedback are learnable, practicable skills. Getting better at giving feedback is not simply about giving more feedback, it’s learning how to give it, positive and negative. Similarly, receiving feedback is not simply about demanding feedback, it’s learning how to receive it, positive and negative, then knowing how to act on that feedback when it’s offered.

There are many ways to do this. For example, our company has developed its own 360 review system. Once a year, each person on a team is asked to write down their top three strengths or areas they believe they’ve most improved and their three biggest weaknesses or areas they feel they need the most growth. Everyone’s answers are consolidated into one document and shared with every member of their team. We then take whatever time it takes—half a day or a full day, depending on the size of the team—to go through it all.

Each person must first read their weaknesses. Then anyone who wants to can add to or comment on that list. At this time, the person sharing their list may not speak. They are prohibited from defending themselves or offering excuses. Their job is to listen. Immediately after, the person reads their strengths. And again, anyone else can add to or comment on the list. Again, the person being reviewed may only listen. At most, we allow clarifying questions. Someone takes responsibility to run the meeting to ensure that anything outside these parameters is quickly shut down.

It is an amazing experience. The most junior person on my team had the opportunity to tell me how I let her down and how I make her feel when I say or do certain things. It was completely eye-opening for me and it was empowering for her to feel heard. We don't use this process as part of our formal evaluations but rather as a growth tool. We are all also members of smaller coaching pods that meet for an hour once a week or once every other week throughout the year to help each other build on what we learned in the review session.

Take Advantage of Your Millennials

More companies would benefit directly by taking advantage of the unique skills and perspectives Millennials bring to the table thanks to their upbringing. For example, Millennials grew up on social media. They have literally spent their entire lives curating their personal brands. They intuitively understand how branding works. Take advantage of it!

Instead of complaining that Millennials aren't showing up or aren't engaged, use them as a barometer of how you are doing as a leader or to gauge the kind of culture the company is building. Consider that older generations may not, in fact, be more engaged in their work (the data supports this), but rather that they are just better at faking it. Use the fact that Millennials are more willing to speak out when they are feeling uninspired, disengaged or dissatisfied as an accurate accounting of how everyone

in the company feels. If given something that inspires them to engage or stick around, Millennials will fully engage for a long, long time.

Growing up in a world of instant gratification has its liabilities. It also offers a huge advantage. Millennials are comfortable with change and quicker to pivot than older generations. I am amazed by how many of them are so comfortable with the thought of quitting their jobs to freelance, join a start-up, or start a company themselves. I've met so many Millennials who quit a job they didn't like without another job lined up. I've never met someone of an older generation who's ever done that. Older generations seem to prefer stability over uncertainty. If there is a project or opportunity that requires lots of quick turns, snap decisions, even risks—throw Millennials at it. Let your older employees support them with experience and know-how. Building on that, although Millennials admit that they struggle to form deep meaningful relationships, they excel at first impressions. They are very impressive at a first engagement. Though they may struggle with issues of self-confidence, they give off an air of confidence that is valuable for networking or sales. Put them on the front line to sell and let the more experienced employees support them to help build deeper relationships with prospects. It will make for a more balanced team dynamic and both generations will learn from each other.

Here are a few more general thoughts to keep in mind if you want to take full advantage of all the gifts Millennial employees offer:

- **Mentor and support them** (acknowledging that sometimes they may not have the courage to ask for it). A true mentor is never too busy to mentor.
- **Lead by example.** Leaders in companies can be better role models than the athletes and movie stars Millennials look up

to now. Show them heroism and leadership in their daily lives, so they don't just associate those qualities with billionaires and celebrities.

- **Talk about your failures.** It's easy to talk about our achievements, but being frank about our failures helps Millennials understand the realities of the journey that is their life and career. Doing so also contributes directly to building a Circle of Safety, helping create a culture in which everyone feels more comfortable to admit mistakes, fears and misgivings.
- **Give them the opportunity to fall.** There is a lot of talk about "embracing failure" in the business press. But the problem with the word "failure" is that it can be an invaluable lesson or it could mean total destruction of a company. We should continue to remind people that failure is bad and should be avoided when possible. What we can embrace is falling. Millennials should be given more opportunities to fall. Opportunities to have a lot of responsibility on smaller projects. And if they screw up we say, "good fall, now try it again."
- **Offer more opportunities to develop "human" skills.** Because an excess of technology can negatively affect how some Millennials connect, it's up to us to bridge the gap. Lead by example by connecting in more human ways. Reduce e-mail use, make more calls instead. Roam the halls more to talk to your people and ask more questions. If we want them to engage better, let us better engage with them.
- **Help them love themselves.** Help Millennials build their self-confidence. Think about how you would want another leader to treat your children. As Bob Chapman from Barry-Wehmiller says, let's work to treat all our people, each of them someone else's son or daughter, the same way.
- **Take a chance on them.** They may surprise you.

- **They are the leaders of the future, but we are the leaders right now.** We are the ones with the authority and an ability to exert far more influence on their lives than they can on ours. We must preach our own causes. We must reconnect with our own Why. We must become the kind of idealist we were when we were younger . . . then build our companies and lead our people to join us.

What Millennials Can Do

I BELIEVE THAT leaders of companies bear some responsibility to move their corporate cultures away from the dog-eat-dog philosophies of yesteryear to more trusting, Circle of Safety–style environments. And that must happen if we want to help Millennials in the workforce work at their natural best. However, as a Millennial, you too have some work to do if you want to reap all the benefits of a good culture. As great as handholding feels in the moment, if your desire is truly to find fulfillment in work and make an impact in the world, there’s going to be some heavy lifting, hard truths to face and much patience required. So . . . if you’re game, read on.

Solve Your Own Problem

If you’re assigned to do something, big or small, and you don’t know how to do it or even how to start, ask for help. If your boss doesn’t give you an answer or the guidance you need, find the answer somewhere else. Some bosses won’t help because they’re assholes, but others won’t help because they want you to figure it out yourself and trust that you’re smart enough to do so. Either way, you need to figure it out because it’s good for you. Google probably won’t help either. The opportunity for growth here is to reach out to other people you know. Friends, old bosses, other

people at the company, the bosses of your friends are all viable choices. This is an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills. In other words, this has to be more than an e-mail request. The most valuable advice will not come from an e-mail response with a list of suggestions or instructions; the real goal of leaving you to figure it out is to push you to cultivate a relationship. Go to someone in the company you may not know, knock on their door and ask for their help. If you're in a small company, look outside the company. Again, the goal isn't to simply have a person other than your boss give you step-by-step instructions, but to learn to develop a relationship with someone who knows more to guide you or act as a sounding board as you figure it out yourself.

Push to Completion

Responsibility or accountability isn't about starting a task or a project. It happens when we carry it to completion. For example, every now and then I ask someone to help me find something or get a hold of someone. A few days go by and I don't hear back, so I follow up on my request. "I looked it up but couldn't find anything" is the answer I get, or "I e-mailed him but haven't gotten a reply back yet." Those who are brilliant at pushing to completion do all the things the rest of us do to start a task and when they run into a roadblock, figure out all the other ways they can continue to make progress. They don't simply repeat what they've done. When asked about their progress they don't reply, "I'll try to e-mail him again." The really gifted Completers start thinking about what workarounds they can use if whatever they tried before isn't working well enough or quickly enough. Even if they never end up having to use that next step, it's already been considered. The gift of this practice is that the next time a similar challenge comes up, ideas are already generated, and new relationships already exist thanks to the way they handled things the previous time. This is what makes them so resourceful. It's not how they solved one problem, it's how prepared they are to solve the next problem.

Beg for Criticism

There is no question positive reinforcement is extremely valuable in any organization. Being recognized for our strengths and contributions does wonders for our self-confidence and our feelings of belonging. However, being told only what we are good at reduces our opportunity to grow. We don't learn much when everything goes well and we get all the answers right. Real learning happens when things go wrong or when we screw up. What we should all want is a balance of feedback. At the end of every project, I ask my team what I could have done better. At the end of most meetings, we tell each other what little mistakes we should watch out for next time. Find the people whom you respect and admire, the ones you want to be more like or know how they are good at something you could be better at, regardless of their rank or responsibility, and ask them what you can do better next time. In time, you will find yourself much more receptive to negative feedback and much better at giving feedback, positive and negative, to others.

Unless your company offers a class on how to give and receive feedback, don't assume those around you, including your boss, know how to give negative feedback. They may be too aggressive. Too blunt. Maybe even a little mean. Perhaps they are bad at giving feedback because no one ever taught them how. Or perhaps they've had bosses who were bad at giving them feedback. Try to brush aside the stuff that offends or upsets you to really try to hear what they are saying you can do better next time. And if they only tell you things like, "don't let that happen again," then work to figure out what you can do better next time, so that it doesn't actually happen again. Preparing to solve a problem for next time feels better than getting upset about our failure to solve it this time.

Sacrifice Credit

Like feedback, giving credit where credit is due goes a long way to building a Circle of Safety and creating an environment of mutual

respect between boss and employee. Of course leaders should publicly acknowledge the hard work that specific people contributed to a project. However, there is more to work than getting the credit for it. Like almost every tip in this section, it's about balance. There is something quite magical about learning to be a shadow player who helps make others look good, whose silent impact makes projects turn out better. There is a humble magic in feeling an immense sense of joy and pride in seeing someone we supported, worked with and helped get the public praise.

Much in the same way parents find real joy in the success of their kids and great leaders feel pride when their people achieve things others didn't think they could, so too can we all learn to feel joy in the contributions we make to see those around us thrive. I know what some of you are thinking: if I did the work, I want the credit. I agree. But the short-term burst of goodness you feel for the extrinsic reward won't last. More important, it won't help you develop the muscle responsible for long-term feelings of fulfillment. What's more, the more others see you experience real joy in being the shadow player, the more they will seek you out for help. The more they will rely on you and trust you. When that happens, take intense pride and joy in the success of the project and start working hard to celebrate each other.

This book, for example, has an acknowledgments section. I didn't have to write it, and most people won't read it. But it's not for you—it's for the people who helped me. It's my little tip of the hat to say thank you. And here's the best part—because of the relationship we've built, almost all of them take immense personal pride when they hear someone say how much they enjoyed this book, without knowing their contribution to its creation. They are the real reason things like this can happen.

Cold Turkey Your Phone

Many of you won't like this one and will think of all kinds of excuses to ignore or avoid doing it. For example, here's a

suggestion: stop keeping your phone by your bed when you sleep, charge your phone in another room. You already have your excuse, don't you: but it's my alarm clock!

I don't need to offer an alternative option for you—you've already read *Solve Your Own Problem and Push to Completion* and know what to do.

Just as an alcoholic removes the alcohol from their house because they can't rely on their willpower not to drink, you need to find ways to keep yourself away from the addictive power of your devices. You are simply not strong enough to deny yourself that hit of dopamine goodness. You have to cut yourself off. I'm not suggesting we abandon our phones or social media altogether, I'm suggesting we regain balance. What I've learned is that if we start with some more dramatic strategies, we can actually beat the habit and overcome our urge to jump every time our phones buzz, ping, flash or beep. Beat the addiction, lose the craving. That's how it works. So . . . what can we do in the short and medium term to help us overcome the urge to constantly check and check in?

1. From this moment on, no cell phones at any meal table. If you're out for lunch or dinner with a friend, family, colleague or client, turn your ringer off and put your phone away and out of sight. Upside down on the table doesn't count. A bottle of vodka with the cap on it won't help the alcoholic beat the craving. It has to be out of sight altogether! If the person you're with takes their phone out—you can say politely, "Hey, let's have a meal together, without our phones." You can make exceptions: if you happen to be waiting for an important message, just inform the people you're with why you need your phone out. Once that message comes in, put the phone away. You get the idea.

You'll probably hate it the first or even dozen times you do it. Too many of us are addicts, remember. Taking away the thing that makes us feel good doesn't feel good. Give it some time and you'll start to feel the effect. We actually enjoy the company of

our friends more. We have an even better time when we go out with them. We have livelier conversations. We learn more about them and they learn more about us. We learn to trust and rely on them more just as they learn to trust and rely on us more. This is one simple step you can take to build deep, meaningful relationships with the people in your lives.

2. On the same note, if you have a spouse or significant other, the next time you go out on a date with them, agree to leave both your phones at home. Or, if you need a phone for kids, to call a car—or take a picture of your food—take just one phone and let the other person carry it. If you are carrying your date's phone, you won't feel the craving to check it and vice versa. The quality of the time you spend together will, in short order, significantly improve. And when you come home to texts from people asking you why you took so long to respond, some of you may start to enjoy replying, "I was out with the person I love and we left our phones at home."

What We Can Do as Parents

Digital-Free Family Vacation

A fourteen-year-old boy I know was furious at his mother for taking over a week to replace his broken cell phone. In the course of that time, his girlfriend broke up with him because he failed to respond to her texts. It's worth noting that the kids go to the same school and live in the same neighborhood. Disturbed by their son's addiction to his phone, the parents came up with what they thought was a radical idea. They took a family vacation and took only one phone with them. With their phones taken away, their two children became agitated and short-tempered. It's safe to say it was starting off looking like the worst family vacation ever. Then, after a few days, something changed. They started to talk and laugh and really bond. It ended up being the best vacation they've ever had together.

Sign the Contract

Cell phone companies make us sign contracts filled with terms and conditions to have our phones, so why shouldn't our kids have to sign a contract to have theirs? Delany Ruston is a psychologist and filmmaker who produced a great documentary called *Screenagers*, in which she tackles whether or not to buy her young teenage daughter a cell phone. In the film, she demonstrates a unique and effective idea—if their daughter wanted the smart phone, she had to sign a contract and agree to certain conditions. I've heard of other parents trying the same thing, too. They are writing up contracts that include terms such as:

- The phone can never be used or even kept in the child's bedroom.
- The child cannot have the phone at any meal table.
- If friends come over, ALL the children have to forfeit their

phones while they are together. (If the friends' parents complain, saying they want their kids to have their phones on them at all times, call those parents and give them the house number to call if they need to get hold of their kids at any time.)

- Restrict the times when they are allowed to use their phones.
- If any of these terms are violated, the child loses their phone for a week.

Spin the Password

One family I met would change the password to the Wi-Fi every day. Only when their kids had completed their chores or their homework would they be given the new password. And even then, it was only enabled for a limited time before being disabled again.

Lead by Example

I frequently hear from parents complaining that their kids are constantly on their phones. However, I also hear from kids that their parents are always on their phones. If we truly believe that our families are more important than our work, we need to prove it. I have met too many parents who actually tell me that they have to have their phones at the family dinner table in case of work calls or e-mails. Unless you're an emergency surgeon on call to save someone's life, unless you're a first responder who has to run out the door at any moment, you need to question whether you *really have to* have your phone at the family dinner table. We can make our kids feel that we don't care about them as much as we say we do simply by having our phones out at the dinner table.

Being a Parent Is Hard Work

It breaks my heart when I go to restaurants and I see entire fam-

ilies on their devices. I was in a restaurant recently where I noticed a mom and grandmother with heads down in their phones. One kid, probably around six or seven, was playing a game on another phone and another kid, probably around nine or ten, had headphones on watching a movie. I saw them while I was eating a few tables away. Over the course of my dinner, nothing changed. When I finally got up to leave, not a single one of them had changed positions.

Another time I was out for brunch and was seated next to what looked like two or three families all out for brunch together. The parents sat at one table and all the kids, six or seven of them, all sat at an adjacent table. Not a single adult had a phone out, but every single kid had their own device and was head down for the entire brunch. I understand the temptation. Sometimes it is so nice to take a little vacation from our kids. But not every time. I honestly believe it would do less long-term damage to a kid to put them up for adoption than to hand them a device every single time we don't want to deal with them. Kids are annoying and loud and they fight and distract us from the things we like doing. That's because they're kids. And being a parent is hard work. Find shortcuts, take breaks from them, put them in front of the TV now and then. But don't fill them up with so much dopamine as impressionable children that you end up doing serious damage to them as adults. If you do let them engage with you or each other more often, you'll find that they say really funny or profound things that remind you that all that annoying stuff is really worth putting up with.

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There is an entire section in the bookshop called “self-help.” What we really need is a section called “help others.” If we all agree to practice even some of these suggestions, we will be pioneering the help-others industry together. Inspire on!

—SIMON SINEK
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