

BOOK REVIEW

LEADING IN TOUGH TIMES: OVERCOME EVEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGES WITH COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE

AUTHOR: JOHN C. MAXWELL

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John Maxwell is considered the most influential leadership expert of the century, being cited in the New York Times bestseller list. He has written 130 books between the years 1979-2023 and has sold more than 35 million books translated into 5 languages worldwide. Among the last published books, we exemplify:

- Leader shift: the 11 essential changes every leader must embrace (2019);
- The leader's greatest return: attracting, developing, and multiplying leaders (2020);
- The self-aware leader: play to your strengths, unleash your team (2021);
- The thinker's age (2022);
- The influence formula (2023).

The book that is the subject of this review "Leading in tough times: overcome even the greatest challenges with courage and confidence"

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(2021) is published by Maxwell motivation, Inc. and published in Romanian in the Amaltea publishing house (2022).

In this period of multiple challenges (after the pandemic, with economic recession, with the acceleration of the implementation of artificial intelligence, wars and others), the role of leaders becomes extremely important and increasingly difficult in making the most effective decisions.

Maxwell's book is positioned in this turbulent context.

The book includes an introduction, seven chapters and conclusions.

In the Introduction, called "*Difficult times. An invitation to opportunity*" the author presents from the perspective of the leader, four advantages of adversity, respectively:

- it helps us to know each other better;
- it teaches us more than success;
- it brings new opportunities and
- it writes our life story, if our reaction is the right one.

Then, he refers to one of the most challenging tasks of a leader, that of being an agent of change. In this sense, he sees the difficulties of the current time as opportunities and proposes the following advice for leaders to do:

- Define the reality for team members;
- Remind them of the overall picture in order to make an effort and see the future benefits;
- Help team members to develop a plan to identify next steps;
- Help team members to make the right decisions;
- Appreciate and promote teamwork through cooperation;
- Give team members hope, since morale means especially the will to succeed.

Next, in the seven chapters, Maxwell refers to as much as major challenges that a leader faces. These are:

1. The challenge of leading one's own life: Preparing one's personal journey

Certainly, a leader must prepare himself to help the team overcome difficulties. That's why Maxwell insists on several aspects, since "self-knowledge is mandatory for effective leadership" (Maxwell, p.14):

- Establishing values: the ability to lead people well, motivation, integrity, relationships;
- Own professional development, self-discipline and responsibilities;
- Taking risks with courage.

2. The change challenge: Become an effective change agent

Change is a process and people are generally reluctant to change. That is precisely why Maxwell offers the following advice to leaders:

- Considering change as an opportunity for the better;
- Accepting the change as necessary;
- Providing team members with small challenges that lead to individual and collective success that sustains the momentum for change;
- Removing obstacles from the past (failures, negative attitude, disappointments);
- Focusing on a single objective;
- Training within the team for a future leader.

3. The challenge related to teamwork: Building and developing the team

A company's fixed assets are subject to wear and tear and lose their value, but people, who represent the most valuable asset, have the potential to increase in value. Precisely for this reason, the author emphasizes the importance of the leader's responsibility towards the people by:

- Providing respect, understanding and appreciation to each member of the team;

- Identifying the objectives and abilities of others; building a strong team through motivation and collaboration;
- Creating a culture that characterizes unity, through involvement, encouragement and support;
- Empowerment of all team members.

4. The motivation challenge: Inspire your team to aim for excellence

Team motivation is also an important characteristic of a good leader and that is why Maxwell advises his leaders:

- Shape your own motivation through passion, principles and practice;
- Build and maintain people's trust;
- Create a culture of motivation, especially through a positive attitude and encouragement.

In fact, motivation means "helping people to see what they can do without your support as a leader and giving them permission to complete those things" (Maxwell, p.58).

5. The strategy challenge: Identify new ways to succeed

To be successful, a leader adopts the strategy appropriate to the context and the moment.

In the face of tough challenges, the author advises that the challenges should be neither underestimated nor overestimated and that we should expect them to resolve themselves. "Difficulties do not resolve themselves, but require deliberate effort and active leadership" (Maxwell, p.61).

In this sense, Maxwell advises that the leader knows what he is doing, be willing to take risks and choose a winning strategy. The leader must visualize the perfect result, interact daily with team members and constantly reevaluate what could work better.

"If you are open-minded and have the right mentality, if you are willing to take risks, if you have a strategy and a good team, then you can overcome any adversity and ultimately win" (Maxwell, p. 69).

6. The communication challenge: How to get everyone on the same page

Effective communication is another characteristic of a good leader. Maxwell believes that people are not good at the same things, that they are not driven by the same things and do not see the big picture like their leaders. Therefore, he advises that leaders:

- to develop their listening skills;
- to create an environment where questions are welcome;
- to ask appropriate questions;
- to be honest and helpful;
- to find a balance between care for relationships and sincerity;
- to clearly explain complex information;
- to have a clear vision regarding success, the role of each member of the team, the way in which success will be measured.

"An optimal communication inspires and causes people to strive to win, because they know what the process consists of and how they will gain from it" (Maxwell, p.82).

7. The decision-making challenge: How to get everyone to adopt the new direction

As Maxwell states, "the greatest challenge of leaders is to make decisions that affect others" (Maxwell, p.83). The chances of overcoming difficulties depend on how the leader:

- Involves others in solving problems;
- He treats people as he himself would like to be treated;
- Instils integrity and ethics, according to one's own behaviour;
- Attracts people who know what he does not know;

- Build a strong foundation for decision-making, through thorough preparation, anticipating the results of each option, seeking advice from the right people and listening to your own instincts.

In conclusion, Maxwell emphasizes the fact that periods of crisis offer the opportunity for rebirth. It helps leaders become stronger, more disciplined and build better relationships, helping people to evolve.