

The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential

By John C. Maxwell

A Study Guide for Leaders in the Church

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In his book, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, John C. Maxwell presents a model of leadership developed through more than 30 years of experience in leadership positions. Maxwell's journey has given him insights into what effective leadership looks like, and this book examines what he identifies as five types of leadership experience.

In order for leadership to be effective, Maxwell has found that it must encompass certain characteristics. Once one finds oneself in a leadership position, the type of leadership style one embraces and how one carries out the tasks of the position will determine whether one will rise to become an effective and successful leader.

The following study guide is especially designed to help pastors in their positions of leadership to examine their own style of leadership and how they fit into Maxwell's model. The aim of this study is to look at the 5 levels Maxwell presents in his book and apply them to the church.

There are six sections below, corresponding to the introductory material and the 5 levels of leadership. As you finish each section of the book, take a few moments to reflect on the questions given in this study guide and consider how you would answer them from the perspective of your ministry context.

Note: The first section of questions for each leadership level is the same. These are general questions to help you consider how the information in the book can be applied to ministry situations. The second section for each leadership level has more specific questions regarding the content of each chapter.

Introduction: You Can Have a Leadership Game Plan for Your Life

1. *Leadership is influence* (p. 2).

In what ways is this a good definition of leadership?

In what ways do you find it inadequate?

How would you define leadership?

2. *Leadership is a process, not a position* (p. 4). Maxwell states that “leadership deals with people and their dynamics, which are continually changing.” In contrast, he says “management is at its best when things stay the same” (p. 4).

What does this say to you about how leaders and managers of people differ?

Do you think you tend to manage others or to lead them?

3. The 5 Levels seeks to give answers to the following questions (p. 4):

Where does leadership start? What should we do first? What processes should we use? How can we gain influence with others? How can we develop a productive team? How do we help followers become leaders in their own right?

How do the ministry leaders and administrative support in your church function?

Would you call them a team?

How well does your staff, ministry leadership, and volunteer leadership work together?

4. On pages 7-10, Maxwell gives a brief summary of each of the 5 levels of leadership.

As you read through these descriptions, were you able to easily identify where you would place yourself?

5. Position:

Position is the lowest level of leadership—the entry level. The only influence a positional leader has is that which comes with the job title. People follow because they have to. Positional leadership is based on the rights granted by the position and title (p. 7).

Even as leaders in the church, would you agree that new leaders must undergo a period during which the congregation comes to accept them as leader?

What do you think a pastor looks like who relies only on the fact that he or she has been called to the position by the congregation or district superintendent?

How would you identify a pastor who has no more influence than position power?

Can you identify this level in the ministry of any of the early apostles?

6. People who make it only to Level 1 may be bosses, but they are not leaders. *Positional leaders usually have difficulty working with volunteers, younger people, and the highly educated. Why? Because positional leaders have no influence, and these types of people tend to be more independent* (p. 7).

Given the fact that so much of the work of the church relies on volunteer labor, how important is it that leaders move beyond a Level 1 type of leadership in the church?

7. Permission:

Level 2 is based entirely on relationships (p. 8).

People follow because they want to. . . . The agenda for leaders on Level 2 isn't preserving their position. It's getting to know their people and figuring out how to get along with them (p. 8).

How can a pastor begin to get to know the people in the church?

In what way do you see this skill at work in the ministry of the early apostles?

8. Production:

Good leaders don't just create a pleasant working environment. They get things done! That's why they must move up to Level 3, which is based on results (p. 8).

What does production look like in the church?

Why is moving up to this level beneficial to the mission of the church?

In what way do you see this skill at work in the ministry of the early apostles?

9. People Development:

Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others. . . . They use their position, relationships, and productivity to invest in their followers and develop them until those followers become leaders in their own right. The result is reproduction; Level 4 leaders reproduce themselves (p. 9).

Why is developing leadership in the church important?

In what way do you see this skill at work in the ministry of the early apostles?

10. Pinnacle:

Level 5 requires not only effort, skill, and intentionality, but also a high level of talent. Only naturally gifted leaders ever make it to this highest level. . . . They develop people to become Level 4 leaders (pp. 9-10).

Level 5 leaders help leaders to develop leaders themselves. In what way is this skill helpful for the church?

Is this a skill the typical pastor should strive for? Why or why not?

In what way do you see this skill at work in the ministry of the early apostles?

11. Be sure to take the Leadership Assessment questionnaires to help you identify your own level of leadership. Take time to reflect on how your assessment compares with that of those you entrusted with these tools on your behalf. Were there any surprises? You may want to take some time to journal about reaction to this assessment. After finishing the book, you may want to go back and look again at what you wrote.

Level 1: Position

Section 1 Questions:

1. What does a Level 1 pastor look like?
2. What are the benefits to the church of a Level 1 pastor?
3. What is the downside to a Level 1 pastor?
4. How does this level of leadership look in the church?
5. How do you think it might differ from the business world?
6. Can you identify any leaders in Scripture that you would place on this level?
7. Do you know any leaders who fit on this level? Would you place yourself at this level?

Section 2 Questions:

1. Good leaders are always good learners. Why is being a good learner vital for being a good leader? What do we mean when we say a person is a good learner?

2. Your values are the soul of your leadership, and they drive your behavior (see pp. 46-47).

What are your ethical values? What does it mean to do the right thing for the right reason?

What are your relational values? How do you build an environment of trust and respect with others?

What are your success values? What goals are worth spending your life on?

3. Immature leaders try to use their position to drive high performance. Mature leaders with self-knowledge realize that consistently high performance from their people isn't prompted by position, power, or rules. It is encouraged by values that are real and genuine (p. 48).

How is this important for a leader of volunteers to realize? In what way is this demonstrated in ministry?

4. People tend to work in places where they feel good about the people, where the environment is good. They leave when they have to work for bad leaders, or find they can't grow to their potential (p. 56).

What does this look like in the church, where the people who are doing the ministry are almost all volunteers?

5. Bad leaders also seem to attract only bad employees. The good ones leave, and mediocre ones take their place. The bad leaders feel uncomfortable with good employees (p. 56).

Once again, what does this look like in the church environment?

6. An exercise given in the book (pp 64-65) is to give a leader a task without giving them the title. They have to figure out how to accomplish the task in teamwork with others without having the authority to tell others what to do. This requires that they find other ways to motivate the employees.

As a pastor, how can you utilize this technique? How is a lack of authority similar to being in charge of a volunteer crew? How does one motivate volunteers who aren't looking for the reward of a paycheck or corporate perks?

7. Moving up to the next level:

Pages 73-81 give help to the leader who wants to move from a positional leadership role to the next level: permission. Read the following statements given in this section and consider how they can help a ministry leader move from positional to permission leadership:

“Titles are not enough.” Do you use your position as pastor (or other ministry position) to garner support from the congregation for the programs you believe are important? What are some ways you can begin to earn the loyalty of the people you serve?

“People--not position--are a leader’s most valuable asset.” Do you believe this?

“A leader doesn’t need to have all the answers.” Do you find yourself avoiding admitting you don’t know everything? Why? How would it make you feel to allow yourself to say, “I don’t know, but I will look into this and let you know what I find out”?

“A good leader always includes others.” Sometimes leaders seem to feel they have to do everything. This can indicate a control issue. Some feel they have to be in control or things won’t get done the way they think they should be done.

If this is a problem for you, ask yourself, the next time you find yourself wanting to micromanage, how critical it is that things be done exactly the way you want them done. Would it be okay if things went off script for a change?

What are the results when the leader always has to be in control? What does this do to the input from others? Can the leader honestly get everything done that needs to be done when they have this kind of attitude to the task at hand? What are the benefits of getting others involved and really letting them take charge?

Level 2: Permission

Section 1 Questions:

1. What does a Level 2 pastor look like?
2. What are the benefits to the church of a Level 2 pastor?
3. What is the downside to a Level 2 pastor?
4. How does this level of leadership look in the church?
5. How do you think it might differ from the business world?
6. Can you identify any leaders in Scripture that you would place on this level?
7. Do you know any leaders who fit on this level? Would you place yourself at this level?

Section 2 Questions:

1. Level 2 relies on people skills, not power, to get things done (p. 67).

Does a pastor ever rely simply on the power of position to achieve ministry goals? How does this differ from actively involving people in their areas of skill and expertise to reach out to the community?

2. When a leader learns to function on the Permission level, everything changes. People do more than merely comply with orders. They actually begin to follow, and they do so because they really want to (p. 85).

How do you know when people are following you because they want to? What do you think that looks like?

3. When leaders move from positional leadership to permission leadership, those under them move from being subordinates to followers.

What's the difference between a subordinate and a follower?

What does a subordinate look like in volunteer ministry? What does a follower look like?

Why is it better to have followers who want to follow rather than followers who have to follow?

4. Today my greatest joy comes from working with my team, not doing the work itself (p. 88).

Does this mean the work is not as important as the time spent with the workers? What about in the ministry? Do you think it is more important for the workers to enjoy working together than getting things done?

5. People are willing to give their best because they know the leader wants the best for them (p. 88).

Why is it important to realize that this matters to people?

How does this kind of working environment impact how the work gets done, or how much of it gets done?

Ultimately, what leader ought the people be seeking to please?

6. Trust is required for people to feel safe enough to create, share, question, attempt, and risk. Without it, leadership is weak and teamwork is impossible (p. 94).

Does it really matter whether or not you have your people on board for ministry in the church?

7. Permission Leadership can appear "soft" to people (p. 94).

Why would this be a downside?

Is it possible to be too relational in the church?

Why is it important to incorporate this facet into your leadership in spite of the downsides?

8. When leaders are relational, their followers naturally get closer to them. That sometimes means that they mistake kindness for weakness. They believe that encouragement means they don't have to respect boundaries. They assume that empowerment means they have the freedom to do whatever they want. As a result, they take advantage of their leaders (p. 99).

The ministry holds as much potential for abuse of relationships as elsewhere. What are ways to avoid these pitfalls without also avoiding the relationships themselves?

9. You may be tempted to build relationships only with the people you like, with whom you are highly compatible, and ignore the others. However, by doing that, you have the potential to lose a lot of people (p. 103).

Why is it important for church leaders to listen to everyone in the church, and not just those with whom they get along best?

10. What role does encouragement play in being a good leader? Why is encouragement important?

11. Care balanced with candor creates developing relationships (p. 112).

How does a permissive leader deal with conflict?

Why is it important to be honest with the team members?

12. Leaders give up the right to cater to an individual if it hurts the team or the organization (p. 115).

Do you think this is also true in the church? Why or why not?

13. Principles for dealing with conflict:

Do it quickly

Do it calmly, never in anger

Do it privately

Do it thoughtfully

How do these principles for handling conflict in a business work in the church?

14. Being candid is a two-way street (p. 117).

Do you allow your team members to honestly critique your performance?

15. Leaders attract who they are, not necessarily who they want (pp. 119-120). If you want to change your team, then change yourself.

Take a look at the people who are closest to you. What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Are there areas you feel you could work on in yourself, based on what you see?

What are some steps you can take to help you and your team grow stronger?

16. Beginning on page 122, Maxwell gives instructions on how a leader can move up to level 3.

Read the statements given in this section and consider how they can help a ministry leader move from permission to production leadership.

Level 3: Production

Section 1 Questions:

1. What does a Level 3 pastor look like?
2. What are the benefits to the church of a Level 3 pastor?
3. What is the downside to a Level 3 pastor?
4. How does this level of leadership look in the church?
5. How do you think it might differ from the business world?
6. Can you identify any leaders in Scripture that you would place on this level?
7. Do you know any leaders who fit on this level? Would you place yourself at this level?

Section 2 Questions:

1. Production leaders produce. A popular saying most of us have heard at some point of our lives is: "It doesn't matter if you win or lose; it's how you play the game."

Do you think there is a conflict between expecting production and having the right spirit regarding winning and losing when it comes to the ministry of the church?

What are some of the benefits/disadvantages of being a production leader in the church?

2. What are the production goals in the church? How does the pastor know these goals are being met? How do we measure success for a pastor or other ministry leader?

3. Maxwell says (pp. 133-34) some people are unable to produce. “When that is the case, it’s usually because they lack the self-discipline, work ethic, organization, or skills to be productive.”

Do you think these are the only reasons one isn’t productive, especially in the church?

Are there times when a lack of production is NOT the fault of the leader?

4. Good leaders constantly communicate the vision of the organization (p. 140).

Do you feel that you do a good job in communicating the vision of your local church? Of the church worldwide?

What would you say that vision looks like?

5. Level 3 leaders help their people to see what productivity looks like (p. 140).

If you had to evaluate yourself on productivity in your church, what grade would you give yourself?

How do you model productivity to your congregation? Is this an appropriate role for a leader in the church?

6. Productivity produces high morale (p. 141).

Church growth theory teaches that a growing church is exciting. People want to be a part of a vibrant congregation. We see this in the mega-churches.

Is this the only factor involved in a successful ministry? What are some other ways to measure the productivity of the church that results in excitement in the congregation?

7. The job of a leader is to help the team succeed (p. 154).

What does success look like for the ministry team in a church?

Take some time to write down some answers to that question, then evaluate where you think you fall on the success measurements you’ve established. Write down the names of your ministry leaders and mark where you think they fall.

How well do you think you are doing as a productive leader in your church?

What about your ministry team?

How does your success affect the overall health of the congregation?

8. Maxwell talks about prioritizing on page 161. He says that a leader must learn not only to get a lot done, “but to get a lot of the right things done.”

What are the right things in the church?

9. Effective prioritizing begins with eliminating the things you shouldn’t be doing (Jim Collins, p. 161).

Have you ever evaluated the ministries of your church to determine if everything being done should be done?

Have you ever had to find a way to eliminate programs or other activities because they were using up time and energy better spent elsewhere?

10. Beginning on page 171, Maxwell gives instructions on how a leader can move up to level 4. Read the statements given in this section and consider how they can help a ministry leader move from production to people development leadership.

11. Are there lessons you’ve learned from this chapter that you feel can make you a better leader in your church? How about a better team leader for the ministry staff?

Level 4: People Development

Section 1 Questions:

1. What does a Level 4 pastor look like?
2. What are the benefits to the church of a Level 4 pastor?
3. What is the downside to a Level 4 pastor?
4. How does this level of leadership look in the church?
5. How do you think it might differ from the business world?
6. Can you identify any leaders in Scripture that you would place on this level?
7. Do you know any leaders who fit on this level? Would you place yourself at this level?

Section 2 Questions:

1. To reach the upper levels of leadership that create elite organizations, leaders must transition from producers to developers. Why? Because people are any organization's most appreciable asset (p. 181).

How is this especially important in the Church? What leaders in the Bible model this type of leadership?

2. How do you grow a company? By growing the people in it (p. 183).

How does one accomplish this in the church?

What are some ways this is already happening in your ministry setting?

Are there ways you can strengthen the way this happens in your church?

3. Maxwell relates a lesson he learned early in his career. While his efforts seemed highly successful, he found that when he left a position, all the progress he had made came to a halt. It was then he realized that his work was in vain if others did not take up the leadership when he was gone (pp. 185-6).

Have you ever been deeply involved in a ministry only to see it go by the wayside when the leader (you or someone else) moved on to new ministry opportunities?

What are the negative effects of such events on the congregations in which they happen? On individuals?

4. Many of us come from the paradigm where the leader is connected to everything of importance in an organization. Authors James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Stayer liken this mind-set to that of a buffalo herd, where everyone waits around to see what the head buffalo thinks and wants to do. Instead, they argue, effective organizations need to be . . . more like flocks of geese, flying in V formation and sharing the load (pp. 186-7).

How can a ministry leader “share the load” with a mostly volunteer work force? Is this practical in the church?

5. Maxwell tells of two kinds of ineffective leaders: 1) The one who can't lead, yet possesses a position of leadership. 2) The one who can lead, but won't share responsibility (p. 188).

Do you think you are either of these leaders?

6. Many leaders don't want to share responsibility with others because they don't want to lose any of their power (p. 191).

Can you think of any reasons why this might be a good thing in terms of responsibility in the church?

What about the benefits of sharing responsibility?

7. Don't mistake gathering a group around you who say what you want to hear for developing new leaders. If they can only agree with you, they aren't going to be able to effectively lead when you are no longer telling them what to do.

How do you avoid gathering followers like these?

8. Review the list of reasons why leaders don't move on to Level 4 beginning on page 196. Do you see yourself in any of these descriptions?

9. Your job is to work yourself out of your job (p. 201).

Not your job as pastor, but maybe as leader of the worship team, or the Food Pantry, or the Sunday School department. Are there people in your congregation who should be doing these jobs? What is the best way to identify and train them? (See Recruiting on pp. 204ff.)

10. Beginning on page 220, Maxwell gives instructions on how a leader can move up to Level 5. Read the statements given in this section and consider how they can help a ministry leader move from people development to pinnacle leadership.

Level 5: The Pinnacle

Section 1 Questions:

1. What does a Level 5 pastor look like?
2. What are the benefits to the church of a Level 5 pastor?
3. What is the downside to a Level 5 pastor?
4. How does this level of leadership look in the church?
5. How do you think it might differ from the business world?
6. Can you identify any leaders in Scripture that you would place on this level?
7. Do you know any leaders who fit on this level? Would you place yourself at this level?

Section 2 Questions:

1. Why is it important for leaders in the church to arrive at Level 5 leadership, the Pinnacle?
Why is it important that the leaders you train should be able to also raise up new leaders?
What does this mean for the kingdom of God?
2. Level 5 leaders are develop leaders who are also developing leaders. How would this look for ministry in the Church? What types of ministries would you support if the congregation had a number of good leaders in it?

3. Level 5 leaders want to do more than just run an organization well. They want to do more than succeed. They want to create a legacy (p. 234).

What kind of legacy is appropriate for a leader in the Church to leave?

4. Maxwell quotes Larry Bossidy's questions regarding leadership on page 235. How would you answer these?

How am I doing as a leader? The answer is how the people you lead are doing? Do they learn? Do they manage conflict? Do they initiate change?

5. What are the downsides of pinnacle leadership (pp. 238ff.)? What dangers are there for the pastor or other ministry leader who reaches this level?

6. On pages 256ff., Maxwell gives instructions on how a leader can help others reach Levels 4 and 5. Read the statements given in this section and consider how they can help a ministry leader teach others to reach the highest levels of leadership as well.

Note: This study guide was developed for pastors and church leaders by *Grace and Peace Magazine* (www.graceandpeacemagazine.org) on behalf of the USA/Canada Region, Church of the Nazarene.