

Breakdown Or Breakthrough: Which One Are You Headed For?

Written by John C. Maxwell

In my experience, the problems of a person's past impact them in one of two ways: they experience either a breakdown or a breakthrough. This month as we gear up for the New Year, take a moment to decide which path you will take. Are you heading toward a breakdown or a breakthrough?

Steps toward a Leadership *Breakdown*:

Comparison

No matter what you've experienced, remember this: there are people who've had it better than you and done worse; and there are people who've had it worse than you and done better. I've watched some very talented people miss opportunities because they were worried about what someone else was receiving or achieving.

If you prepare yourself to the best of your abilities and give your all in every situation, you will be successful. You may not always win, but you will be a winner.

One of my favorite thoughts about comparison comes from a young girl who was competing in a pageant. "There will always be someone prettier than me, more talented than me, and more graceful than me. I can only hope they aren't on the same stage as me."

Rationalization

In this day and age it seems that people can rationalize any situation. A cartoon which appeared a few years ago in the New Yorker showed two clean-shaven middle-aged men sitting together in a jail cell. One inmate turned to the other and said, "All along, I thought our level of corruption fell well within community standards."

Taking responsibility instead of rationalizing is a matter of integrity. And integrity is the foundation of leadership.

Isolation

You can't be a leader if you're all alone. Leadership requires teamwork, and teamwork requires people. Trying to avoid a challenge or problem by isolating yourself from everyone always results in a larger problem. You may need to separate yourself from most of the group to solve a problem; however, you should always have contact with at least one other person who can mentor you and help you through the situation.

Your mentor may not be able to help you find a solution more quickly, but a mentor serves as an encourager, which is sometimes just as valuable.

Regret

Yesterday ended last night. As much as we would like to, we can't go back and change what has already happened. We can only move forward and do the best we can today. Regret merely drains our energy and makes it harder to move on.

Bitterness

Past hurts can make you bitter or better. If you hold onto disappointment you become bitter. If

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you learn from disappointment you have a better chance of not facing the same disappointment later on. I have found that grudges hurt me more than they will the other person; therefore, clinging to bitterness wastes time and energy.

Remember the story of Joseph? He was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and put in jail; however, he didn't hold a grudge against the people who wronged him. Joseph found the positive benefits in his negative experiences, and went on to be a powerful ruler in Egypt.

Steps Toward a Leadership *Breakthrough*:

I believe that a leader faces many hurdles—however, he or she becomes stronger and more accurate at every leap. Begin the process by practicing the following steps.

Personal Growth

Leadership, just as life, is a journey. You must continue to learn in order to lead. Each day I try to learn something, file something and teach something. I learn from reading books, listening to tapes or meeting with other leaders.

I file the best quotes and stories that I find, which improves my work as an author and speaker. I also learn a great deal from teaching. My audience lets me know if I am connecting and helping them with the lessons I give.

As a leader, you need to develop your own personal growth plan. Include resources and experiences that will help you grow professionally as well as personally. The desire to grow is the first important step toward a leadership breakthrough.

Responsibility

One of the differences between a leader and a follower is the willingness to accept responsibility. A leader takes on the challenge and takes responsibility for the outcome. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. said, "I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty."

As a leader, you must become more concerned with your responsibility than your rights. People who take responsibility get the job done, go the extra mile, are driven by excellence, and produce regardless of the situation.

Connection

As a leader, your relationships with your team members will determine the effectiveness of the team. Before you will be able to rally the efforts of your followers, you need to find out where they are, move toward them, and connect with them.

Remember: you can connect with people and lead them only if you value them.

Here are some ways to connect:

- Make getting to know your people a priority.

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- Look for things that you and your team members have in common such as hobbies, experiences, interests.
- Respect differences in opinions or personalities.
- Find out what motivates your people.
- Include your team in the leadership process by asking for their ideas and suggestions.

Resolve

Truly effective leaders must know their priorities and be able to concentrate their time and energy on meeting goals. A leader who knows his or her priorities but lacks concentration knows what to do but never gets it done. A leader who has concentration but no priorities has excellence without progress.

I have found that I am most productive and successful when I concentrate 70 percent of my time and energy on my strengths, 25 percent on new things, and 5 percent on areas of weakness. Learn what you do well that brings the greatest results and make it your priority, and dedicate the balance of your time to growth.

Positive Attitude

When you are leading a group of people, your attitude is extremely important. Because attitudes are contagious, your team will recognize your attitude and adapt to the example you set. If you appear irritated about the challenges your team faces, then your team members will become irritated too.

Your progress and the chance for success will be hindered if your attitude isn't right. It is impossible for us to tailor our situations to fit our lives, but it is possible to tailor our attitudes to fit our situation.

Tailoring your attitude may take a lot of work. Start by surrounding yourself with positive pictures, sayings and people. Read motivational books. Then try to achieve a goal every day. Your attitude will become more positive as you learn and sense that you are making progress.

Leadership develops from the inside out. Achieving a breakthrough works the same way. You have the choice to become a more effective leader in the New Year. It may mean letting go of the past and moving forward with a new focus, but you'll be glad you started moving in a new direction as you see the benefits of reaching your leadership potential.

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