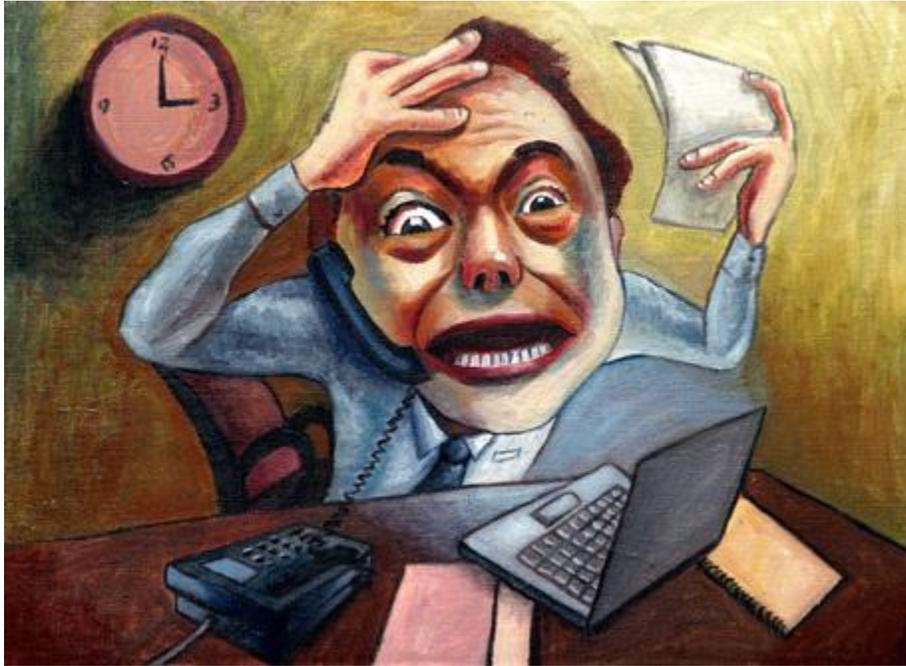


START SMALL
big
CHALLENGE

SUCCESS MAGAZINE'S 2ND ANNUAL
START SMALL WIN BIG CHALLENGE
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John C. Maxwell is an internationally respected leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold more than 18 million books. Dr. Maxwell is the founder of EQUIP, a non-profit organization that has trained more than 5 million leaders in 126 countries worldwide. A *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* best-selling author, Maxwell has written three books that have sold more than a million copies.

What Your Office Says About You

Where do you go for wisdom? All of us in this leadership business know it's crucial to be lifelong learners, to be students of the world. So how can we tap into the knowledge of others?

We know the usual routes: a book, a class, or—my favorite—a list of questions and a lunch date with someone we admire. But today I want to let you in on one of my secret and subtle ways of learning.

I visit people's offices. Let me explain: You remember that old saying, "If these walls could talk..." Well, listen—because they do talk. The books on the shelves, sayings on the walls,

memorabilia in the displays: They are windows into that person's leadership style, the sources of his or her inspiration, the values that drive his or her decisions.

Indulge me for a few minutes, and let's "tour" some offices I find particularly rich with leadership lessons. Then we'll visit my office, and I'll share some things I display that keep me motivated and might offer lessons for you.

I've learned a lot from renowned UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. When I finally met him, I was delighted that he invited me to his condo after lunch.

Prominently displayed was his famous Pyramid of Success, that wonderful visual reminder of the key pillars of leadership, such as "poise," "enthusiasm," "inventiveness" and, of course, "team spirit." The majority of the real estate on his walls was dedicated to his past players. He loved them and kept in constant contact with them. Wooden used to say, "Make every day your masterpiece." That philosophy echoed throughout the room, especially in the photographs of past players. It was the people in his life who made every day so special.

Seeing that and other mementos from his career ultimately inspired me to write my book *Today Matters*.

I'm told Bill Gates had a picture of Henry Ford in his office to remind him how not to treat his customers. Ford famously said, "Any customer can have a car painted any color he wants so long as it is black." That stubborn refusal to change cost Ford Motor Co. its preeminence in the automobile business.

As New York City mayor, Rudy Giuliani kept a sign on his desk that said, "I'm Responsible." And Giuliani was, as he reduced New York's crime rate from an all-time high and later led the city after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Think about that: "I'm Responsible." You can't pass the buck if a message like that dominates your office and your thinking.

I can't visit presidents' offices, so instead I visit presidential libraries. My wife, Margaret, and I have seen them all. Those libraries are full of writings, documents and photographs—stuff from their walls and desks that reveals so much about what drove them as leaders.

My favorite library is Ronald Reagan's. A sign from his Oval Office desk revealed his essential attitude toward governing: "It Can Be Done." Reagan believed our country and its people could get back on track and be great again. His belief became our belief. Isn't that message an essential one for every individual, business and government? Doesn't Reagan's sign prompt you to think about your attitude toward possibility?

Offices can teach us other things, too, such as how leaders communicate. One favorite example comes from computer company founder Michael Dell. I've read that he keeps a toy bulldozer on his desk. It reminds him not to crush ideas from his staff. The more power a leader has, the more mindfully he needs to push back his own ideas in order to encourage others to offer innovations.

Or here's another great example: When he was a Capital One vice president, Steve Arneson (now a leadership consultant) had a sign that read, "Leaders are known for the questions they ask, not the answers that they give." Arneson's sign is right. It's impossible to have great answers for your people if you haven't asked great questions first.

I didn't do such a good job of that early in my career. Now I end each meeting by asking my team, "OK, what did I miss?" Then I let them respond.

So let's visit my office for a minute. I love taking people into my office because it illustrates my journey as a person and a leader.

I keep a shelf of favorite books, the ones that have changed my life, such as Wooden's *The Essential Wooden* and Mother Teresa's *Come Be My Light*. I have memorabilia of Christian reformer John Wesley. You all know I started off as a preacher, and my love of the faith drives my decisions. What drives yours?

On my wall hangs a photograph of Mother Teresa with my son Joel at age 16. He had a bit of an attitude problem then, and I sent him to India for a month so he could see the world as it was, not how he thought it was. He worked in a food line in Kolkata several weeks and then traveled the country by train in coach class, which meant sitting on a wooden bench crammed with people, chickens running around at their feet.

Our deal was I'd get him an audience with Mother Teresa after his tour. He spent 20 minutes with her, and the photo of them is a prized family possession. But it's more than that: It's a reminder to see the world from multiple perspectives, make decisions with empathy, appreciate what you have and work to better the lives of people who don't have as much.

I have a photograph of my brother Larry, our dad, Melvin, and me in front of the Maxwell Leadership Center at Indiana Wesleyan University. Every time I see it, I think about my father's great legacy of leadership and character, and how important it is to me to continue it.

I've got a photograph of Margaret and me on our 40th anniversary. She's my best friend, and this picture reminds me that my success is her success, that our partnership allows us to lead others on a path of positivity, self-improvement and compassion. Who is your partner on your journey?

What's on your wall? Are there words of wisdom that keep you on track? Photos of someone who inspires you? Reminders of what's most important in your life?

As you approach the new year, give it some thought. You may need to open a box in the attic to find something important. You may need to search stores for the perfect sign. And you may want to take down a few things to make space for something else. What you have on your walls communicates a lot to you and says a lot about you to others.