

STARTING - The First Step Toward Success

John C. Maxwell



Sprinters practice racing out of the starting blocks. Salespeople are coached in the power of a first impression. Orators devote hours to opening statements. Interviewees are taught the importance of their initial handshake with a potential employer.

In leadership, as in many other areas of life, the beginning often determines the end. False starts and weak foundations can be ruinous. Here are five insights to help you start successfully.

HOW TO START SUCCESSFULLY

1. Start With Yourself

As Gandhi famously said, "Be the change you want to be in the world." By starting with yourself, you build the self-confidence needed to attract and inspire others. Leading yourself well is a precursor to accomplishment, and accomplishment earns respect.

In order to make deposits in the lives of followers, you have to have a beginning balance in your leadership account. Start leading by proving your mettle - to yourself and to prospective followers.

2. Start early

Sadly, many leaders squander their early years and spend the rest of their careers trying to make up for lost time. In leadership, as with finances, decisions made early in life accrue the most interest. When we choose poorly or establish bad habits, we put ourselves in debt. Then, we must not only repay our loans, but the interest on them as well. On the flip side, when we invest our time and talent wisely from a young age, we reap the benefits of compounding interest on our leadership.

Specifically, where should leaders start? What areas should take precedence at the beginning? From my experience there are 10 things you should do as a leader prior to reaching age 40:

1. Know yourself
2. Settle your family life
3. Determine your priorities
4. Develop your philosophy of life
5. Get physically fit
6. Learn your trade
7. Pay the price
8. Develop solid relationships
9. Prepare for the future
10. Find purpose for your life

If you're over 40, it's never too late to make improvements. Unfortunately, an old dog doesn't easily learn new tricks. Undoing years of misplaced priorities and poor self-management will take extra effort.

3. Start Small

Don't expect to understand what it takes to get to the top, just take the next step.

Think big, but start small. Doing so encourages you to get started, and keeps you from being frozen by the magnitude of the vision in front of you. When you accomplish a small step, you gain confidence that you can accomplish the next step.

The success found in starting small comes when you diligently apply the lessons you learn. As my friend, Dick Biggs, has said, "The greatest gap is between knowing and doing." Commit to mastering the details under your control, and follow through when experience has given you instruction.

4. Start with the end in view

"Most people spend more time planning their grocery shopping than designing their future."

- Tom James, Personal Development Coach

To start with the end in view, you need energy and direction. Let your passion pull you forward, and let your planning give you guidance. In order for passion to be a driving force in your life, you must identify a purpose for your life. To locate your purpose, consider your strengths, interests, and past successes. What roles do you find most enjoyable? What brings you the greatest sense of satisfaction? Examine the areas that make you feel strong and angle your career toward them. Also, find people who have been successful in the area of your interest. Listen to them and watch their lives.

For planning to give you direction, you need to write down goals. Goals lend structure to your purpose, and they keep you leading "within the lines." They focus your action and move you toward your overall vision.

5. Start Now

We exaggerate yesterday, overestimate tomorrow, and underestimate today. Embrace action daily. Don't wait until it's too late before you begin to pursue the visions implanted in your heart. Make each day your masterpiece; you'll be surprised where you end up after stringing together a few months of superb days.

I'll leave you with one final thought:

"How wonderful it is that we need not wait a single minute before starting to improve ourselves and our world." - Anne Frank

Review - Five Steps to Starting Successfully

1. Start Early
2. Start with Yourself
3. Start Small
4. Start with the End in View
5. Start Now

John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold over 16 million books. His organizations have trained more than 2 million leaders worldwide.

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