

Leadership Actions *That Will Ignite Your Organization*

Throughout the story, there are many opportunities for the reader to identify actions they could take, which would help strengthen their leadership platform. The reality is there are countless opportunities all around you to identify leadership actions to implement. You have to take the time to look and to think, but they are there. Movies, magazines, blogs, seminars, webinars, songs on the radio, sporting events, and watching other leaders perform are just a few and can all stimulate ideas that lead to action. As a result of positive action, employees will follow the lead of the leader and become more fully engaged and driven to contribute to the success of the organization.

Taken from Sparks' story, here are some actions and advice to help you grow as a leader.

From the 5:00 am “*The Dream*” chapter

- Regardless of how effective you think your meetings are today, search for new ways to make them more productive and worthwhile for the attendees. Don't be afraid to mix in an element of fun. Your meetings must have a meaningful purpose and relevant content. Have you tried to calculate a ROI on your meetings lately? Have you determined the true cost of your meetings and asked how many sales dollars it takes to pay for the meeting you are holding?
- Challenge your organization to evaluate the value of the meetings they hold as well.
- Direct communication is exceptionally powerful. Everybody wants and expects straight answers from their leader. The leader earns respect and establishes credibility by being direct and to the point.
- Look for opportunities to emphasize and practice safety at your work place. Extend that to employees' homes where practical. As an example, find ways to introduce camping or boating safety guidelines during the summer or cooking safety during the holiday season.
- Develop less experienced employees by creating a formal and effective mentoring program in your organization.
- Empower others to take a “you are the president of your own business” approach to their responsibilities. Be certain they understand they must stay within the guidelines of the organization.

From the 6:15 am “*Driving to Work*” chapter

- Challenge everyone with career goals. It’s much more exciting to be working towards going somewhere than it is to just have a job.
- Encourage everyone in your organization to create a self development plan. Focus on professional skills that will help them contribute to the company and will enhance their career. Provide them the tools, time, and resources to enable success.
- Carefully plan for succession. Every position should have a succession plan.
- Be a team player not a politician. I’m not a big fan of office politics. In fact, it makes me sick to think of all the wasted time and energy resulting from someone’s selfish interests. Your team will be excited and proud of you for doing the right thing for the benefit of the organization.
- Always do what you say you will do. Being reliable and dependable is a sure fire way to earn trust and demonstrate your good character. There may be times, however, when circumstances prevent you from doing what you said you would. Should this happen, and it will, don’t ignore it. You can avoid a huge hit to your credibility by addressing the issue with those involved, apologize, and explain why you couldn’t do what you said you would do.

From the 6:30 am “*The Accident*” chapter

- Be prepared to act in times of need. As a leader, you will be looked to solve an unexpected and likely unwanted problem. It could be an accident on the way to the office or a flat tire—yours or someone else’s. The problem could be a short-term financial challenge you or someone else incurs. You must be prepared to demonstrate leadership by taking action and moving on.
- When was the last time you looked at the practicality and appropriateness of your company policies and procedures? It is quite possible that you’ve got policies that are outdated, or they don’t work for your customers or employees anymore. Get rid of them, or fix them. Give everyone a reason to stand up and cheer.
- I can’t emphasize enough the importance of a stellar communication process that goes full circle. Make sure everyone knows what is going on and who is doing what. Consider the amount of communication going on in the accident scene in the story. As the saying

goes, it's critical that the left hand and the right hand know what's going on. Develop a Communication Strategy; don't just "wing it."

- As a successful leader you have already embraced accountability. You need to ensure you have the ability to hold others accountable for their performance, actions, and behavior. A weak leader will look the other way when someone makes excuses or denies fault. The problem for this leader is everyone knows they're weak and will look forward to their opportunity to avoid accountability. A strong leader will hold others accountable, and the entire organization knows it, accepts it, and expects it.
- Always tell the truth. Your organization knows when you don't. As a result, you will lose credibility and won't be trusted, which will greatly impact your ability to lead.

From the 7:25 am "Mental Toughness" chapter

- If you aren't the first one in the office in the morning, you're missing an opportunity to lead by example and an opportunity to get more done in a day. Surprise yourself and your organization; get there first.
- Keep your work-life balance visible. This will demonstrate you are human, and that it's important to you, as it should be for your organization.
- Support others in their work-life balance, but be careful of abuse.
- As you set expectations for work-life balance and delegate tasks or assignments, you must be realistic. Unrealistic expectations can deflate key members of your organization, dramatically impacting morale.
- Be prepared to respond in stressful situations by demonstrating mental toughness. The best way to prepare for this is to anticipate situations that will be stressful and play them out in your mind in advance.

From the 7:40 am "Coaching Kyle" chapter

- Leading is not about you. Shift the focus of attention to what you did away from you. Give credit to others for getting the job done. Everyone respects leaders who practice humility.

- Show a genuine interest in the lives of others—your employees, your vendors, and your customers. We are all people trying to get along, and the more you know about someone, the more likely you will be in a position to help them one day.
- Begin to coach by using the art of questioning. Coaching by telling someone what to do in a given situation isn't always the most effective way to lead. Try coaching by asking questions, and make sure they are good questions.
- Helping others solve problems should be a routine occurrence for any leader. Actively seek out problems, and help solve them. Don't wait for them to come to you; go find them in the hallways, in the kitchen, anywhere.
- When was the last time you put on a pot of coffee or washed the dishes in the break room? Demonstrating you are human with these or other routine tasks won't kill you, nor will they eat away at your precious time. You will earn loyalty and respect, which is well worth the price of rolling up your sleeves.

From the 8:25 am “You Must Care” chapter

- There are many ways you can demonstrate that you genuinely care about your team, your vendors, and your family. As you read this you, are probably thinking, “What’s the big deal? I care.” Sure, you care, but I challenge you to pick it up a notch. Identify at least 10 different ways that you demonstrate you genuinely care. Here are five ideas to get you started with any and all persons:
 - i. Acknowledge everyone’s birthday and find out how they plan to celebrate.
 - ii. Know everyone’s career goals. Ask them for progress updates.
 - iii. Pay attention to everyone’s work-life balance, and help keep it balanced.
 - iv. Understand their problems at work, and help them solve them.
 - v. Listen intently to them as they talk about their families. What can you do to make a difference?
- Everyone likes to be acknowledged or praised by the boss, so dish it out, but do so with sincerity and publicly. Be generous with gratitude.
- Find and share stories, articles, quotes, or books of inspiration. We all need a boost, and as the leader, everyone looks to you to provide it.
- Practice empathy. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes before you judge. Be careful not to confuse empathy with sympathy. A great leader can distinguish the difference and make good decisions or judgments by doing the right thing.

- At some point in your career as a leader, you will be challenged with circumstances or issues that will be personally hard for you to address. When you do, always remember to treat everyone with dignity and respect. It is much easier if you are in the habit of treating everyone with dignity and respect when there are no issues to address.

From the 9:10 am “*John’s Not Happy*” chapter

- You are always on stage, so be authentic, but as you are being yourself, remember to always be professional and mature. Don’t put yourself in a position of bad mouthing others or yelling at someone. Be authentic, but don’t be an idiot.
- Be consistent in managing yourself. Be professional and mature in your actions and behavior. You will lose respect if you waver from taking the high ground.
- Address conflict as soon as is practical. Many leaders don’t like conflict and don’t like to address it. Don’t let conflict linger because you think it will go away or it will work its way out. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn’t. When it doesn’t, it will cause organizational disruption, and you may lose some respect for not handling it.
- During your career as a leader, you will be faced with many stressful situations. People, products, or processes will likely be the cause. Learning to demonstrate calmness in all situations will set you apart from other leaders. The best advice I can give you is to anticipate possible stressful situations and prepare yourself by thinking it through in advance. Eliminate the stress through visualization.
- Emphasize what is right for the team. Make decisions without personal bias. Your character is on the line with every decision. You are expected to do the right thing for the right reasons. Wavering from this point will have an instant impact on your credibility.

From the 9:20 am “*Communication*” chapter

- Don’t hide behind your email. Cowards hide behind their email, not leaders. If you have something that needs to be said or done, go say it, or go do it. Wasting time writing an email is not what exceptional leaders do.
- Become a better listener. There are all kinds of techniques to accomplish this. Here are a few:
 - i. Make eye contact and concentrate on the listener.

- ii. Ask good questions for clarity.
 - iii. Put all distractions aside—keyboard, phone, reading material and others.
 - iv. Establish a follow-up course of action or closure.
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- Create an environment where your employees are excited and engaged with a focal point. A focal point is simply a meaningful theme to which everyone can relate and makes them feel their job is important to the success of the company. It must be designed in a way that everyone can contribute to it, and the focal point must be easy to understand and measure.
 - Begin to identify and crush time wasters—things that you do that waste your time. Begin to catch yourself wasting time, and create a list of these activities. Think about what you can do to eliminate them from your day.
 - Stay close to your customers with regular contact that adds value to the relationship. Never ever think that you have a relationship with a customer that you won't lose.

From the 9:55 am “*Learning to Think*” chapter

- Be prepared for any situation by thinking issues through in advance. You can do this alone, and you should have regular brainstorming sessions with key members of your team, mentor, or coach.
- Schedule time to continue to grow and develop professionally. Read, attend webinars, seminars, workshops, listen to CDs or watch videos; it doesn't matter. Do what you can do, but set a percentage of your time aside to do it.
- Learn to master the art of delegation, and delegate freely and with confidence. Think about this statement: “The less I do, the more I get done.” Proper delegation will enable you to lead instead of manage or administrate.
- Your actions and decisions must be in alignment with your company's vision, mission, and values. Too many times, leaders have these plastered everywhere but don't live them. Don't let this be you.
- Hiring decisions, firing decisions, customer service decisions, policy creation decisions and other decisions should be in alignment with your company values. If they're not, you have to ask yourself if you are providing “lip service” or leadership.

From the 10:00 am “*Jack’s Meeting*” chapter

- Schedule time to think and plan on a regular basis. Do this in an environment that enables you to be productive. Constructed properly, this time alone will help you prepare to lead your business.
- To help you become better prepared, challenge yourself by asking yourself tough questions. Add to the three questions mentioned in the chapter.
- Encourage others to ask you tough questions. Have them come prepared to a meeting with one to three of their most difficult questions for you. You will be surprised with what they come up with, and it’s better to prepare for the response now instead of in the heat of the moment.
- Ask others good questions for the same reasons as above.
- Solve problems before they’re problems by anticipating the problem and doing something about it today, so it’s not a problem later on. As an example, what is the one reason your most profitable customer would leave you? Be objective, and try to answer this, or be prepared to solve the problem before they do leave you.

From the 10:15 am “*John on the Telephone*” chapter

- Treat others the way you would like to be treated, and you will find that you will earn the respect and confidence of your team.
- As much as you care about your team, you have to hold them accountable for their performance and their behavior. If you don’t, overtime you will lose the support of your team.
- You must be consistent in your leadership. Consistency earns respect and credibility. Knowing how you will handle situations helps your team respond by doing the right thing.
- You must gather all of the facts before assigning accountability. Listen, ask questions, listen, observe, and decide. Too many managers jump to conclusions and rush to judgment because they don’t seem to have the time to do things right. Making the wrong decision in assigning accountability can quickly destroy your leadership.
- Don’t make all the decisions in a vacuum. Get others involved in the decision-making process. It can be a learning lesson for them and exposure to you in how you handle these situations is also an invaluable learning experience.

From the 10:25 am “*Gord’s Meeting*” chapter

- Plan for growth and succession. Look and think ahead to where you are going, and anticipate your organization’s needs to get there and beyond. If you do not have an active living, breathing succession plan in place to replace yourself, you are failing as a leader. Extend your succession planning deep in the organization.
- It is not a sign of weakness if you get third party input on decisions. A different perspective can be extremely valuable as it keeps you from becoming stale, and it provides you the confidence through validation of the decisions you are about to make. Mentors, coaches, and other trusted advisors can help you become a more effective leader.
- Solicit and respect input and feedback from others, but remember, you are ultimately accountable for the decision. In some circumstances, you may need to explain to someone why you chose not to implement their input/feedback. They will respect you for your honesty and your decision.
- As you hire new members to your organization, it’s important that the values, philosophies, and practices of the person you are hiring are truly in alignment with those of the company’s. Check your hiring practices to ensure diversity and alignment.
- Take personal bias out of your decision making. We all have our favorite employees who we’d like to see get a promotion. Your best sales professional could very well be your worst sales manager ever. Be sure their skills match-up with the skills required for the job.

From the 11:00 am “*Personal Accountability*” chapter

- Stop pointing your finger at others for something that has gone wrong. Fix the problem.
- Stop making excuses for something that has gone wrong. Help solve the problem.
- Quit complaining about others. Do your job, and help them do theirs better.
- Always do what you say you will do, or explain why you can’t.
- Never be afraid to hold others accountable for their actions, behavior, or performance even if it means terminating your top person for inappropriate conduct.

From the 11:30 am “*The Sales Meeting*” chapter

- Find reasons to celebrate with your team and celebrate appropriately.
- Remain humble and generously give others meaningful credit for the things that they accomplish and the things that are important to them.
- Be attentive to the feelings of others, and learn the techniques and language that will help put them in a positive place.
- Always be attentive to your approach in communicating to a group. An enthusiastic and uplifting approach complete with appropriate body language will give your team great confidence in themselves and you.
- Make training and professional growth and development part of your culture.

From the 1:30 pm “*Meeting With John*” chapter

- Treat everyone with respect and dignity. You’re the leader; everyone follows the leader, and if you don’t do this, you will have chaos in your organization before you know it. Respect and dignity should travel up, down, across, and outside of the organization.
- Pay attention to the signals you send your team. The signals you send can form unwanted perceptions of your leadership, particularly if you do one thing and say another.
- It is extremely important for leaders to develop leadership traits in others. Regardless of who you interact within your organization, teach them directly or by your actions how to behave as a leader.
- If you are in a position to eliminate office politics from your organization, you should do so. Nothing ever good comes from office politics.
- Apologize. When you are wrong or when you make a mistake, it is imperative to acknowledge your error, fix it if you can, eat some humble pie, and apologize. Put your ego in the closet. You will mess up, everyone will know it, and there is no hiding or running away from it. There are leaders who will not apologize for their mistakes no matter the circumstances, and the respect for them takes a permanent hit.

From the 2:05 pm “*Jack and John Meet*” chapter

- Build a good relationship with your peers. It’s healthy for you, them, and the rest of the organization.
- Behave selflessly. Challenge yourself to find opportunities to demonstrate this leadership trait. Why not set yourself a goal of a certain number of selflessness acts every week?
- Regularly solicit and encourage feedback. Do it formally and informally.
- Everyone needs you to provide them with positive reinforcement. Just make sure it is delivered in a sincere manner.
- Embrace diversity as it is the most underutilized power available to all leaders.

From the 3:00 pm “*Saving Kyle*” chapter

- Great leaders look out for others. Whether it is an opportunity or danger ahead, they’ve got your back.
- Hire the best people, and hang on to them.
- Respect and protect the investment you make in people. The true cost of replacing people is enormous when you consider both the hard and soft costs.
- It’s the little things you do that can make an employee leave you or stay with you. Be sure you know what the good things are.
- Never stop giving because my experience is the more you give, the more you’ll get. The more you take, the less you’ll get.

From the 3:35 pm “*Mentoring Frank*” chapter

- Embrace new ideas and new technology. If you don’t, you will become a dinosaur.
- Return your phone calls. Somebody needs or wants you, and it’s imperative to them that you respond. Don’t use “too busy” as an excuse because a great leader doesn’t deal in excuses.
- Developing other leaders is one of the most important things you can do as a leader.

- Share your knowledge and experience with others. By sharing, you may be contributing to their success and receive the personal satisfaction that you did.
- Make time for others. It's easier to do than you think.

From the 4:30 pm “*Gord’s Decision*” chapter

- Maintain unwavering character.
- Be authentic; demonstrate you genuinely care.
- Develop stellar communication skills.
- Become a great thinker with mental toughness.
- Embrace accountability.
- It is these six core leadership competencies that will help you grow as a leader in the long run.

From the 5:15 pm “*John Doesn’t Fit*” chapter

- Walk the talk. A leader who walks the talk will be trusted, respected, and admired by their organization. Those that don't are viewed as hypocrites who will not earn the same level of support.
- Never tolerate mediocrity. If you have a “round peg in a square hole” situation, it is your job to fix it. Do not ignore it because it won't go away. Either make the “round peg” square or the “square peg” round or get yourself a new “square peg”. It is your choice, but do something.
- Never, ever, ever think you've made it. Keep learning how to and working at becoming a better leader and a better boss.

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