

A woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white blouse, is sitting at a table. She is smiling and gesturing with her hands as if in a meeting or presentation. The background is a bright, modern office space with large windows.

# THE ULTIMATE LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

10 RULES FOR LEADERS THAT  
ARE IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE

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## Introduction - Welcome to the Leadership Jungle

Ever feel like leadership advice is just recycled buzzwords wrapped in a fancy suit? “Empower your team,” “drive innovation,” “foster a growth mindset”—yawn. The truth is, leading people is more like trying to juggle chainsaws while riding a unicycle. It’s messy, unpredictable, and sometimes downright terrifying.

So, this isn’t your typical leadership fluff; this is your ultimate playbook for navigating the chaos of work with humour, confidence, and a little swagger. Let’s get you from surviving to thriving, one rule at a time.

Whether you’re a seasoned executive, an HR professional battling the war on talent, or a leader just trying to make it through Monday, the rules in this playbook, when applied, are simple and game changing. We’re talking about the stuff they don’t teach you in business school, the transformative tips that separate the good from the great.

This isn’t just about being a leader; it’s about being the kind of leader people actually want to follow. We’ll cover everything from mastering the art of delegation without turning into a micromanaging monster to harnessing the power of vulnerability without losing your credibility. And yes, we’ll back it all up with real examples, science, and a healthy dose of humour because if you’re not having at least a little fun, what’s the point?

So, buckle up. It’s time to flip the script on leadership, ditch the clichés, and dive into the ultimate playbook of rules you can’t afford to ignore. Let’s do this.

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# Rule 1

## Manage Things, and Lead People

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The core of leadership isn't about managing tasks, it's about leading people. Too many leaders get stuck in the weeds, focusing on projects and deadlines, forgetting that their real power lies in their ability to connect with the human beings behind the work. When you ask, "What are you working on?" you're managing. But when you ask, "How are you doing?" you're leading.

I once coached a leader who improved the performance of his entire team by shifting his focus from tasks to people. Instead of starting meetings with status updates, he'd ask, "How's everyone doing?" That simple shift changed everything. It created trust, lowered stress, and built a culture of support and accountability.

How to Apply It: Begin each interaction by focusing on the person, not the task. A simple "How's your day going?" can create a connection that drives deeper engagement. Research from Gallup shows that employees who feel genuinely cared for are far more committed and productive. Ultimately, great leaders know one thing, you manage things but lead people. For more on the difference between management and leadership, [click this link](#).



## Rule 2

## Focus on What's Important, Not Just What's Urgent

In leadership, getting caught up in the whirlwind of daily fires, urgent emails, meetings that should've been an email, and endless task lists is easy. But the best leaders don't just react to what's urgent; they zero in on what's truly important. It's about setting priorities that align with your bigger vision, not just checking boxes.

I once worked with a leader who spent all day fighting fires, but he never made progress on what mattered. It wasn't until he started dedicating time each week to strategic thinking and goal-setting that his team and results began to thrive.

How to Apply It: Use the "80/20 Rule" (Pareto Principle)—focus on the 20% of activities that will drive 80% of your results. Schedule weekly time for deep work on high-impact tasks, and learn to say no to distractions. Great leaders know the difference: Urgent gets attention, but important gets results. For a rundown on prioritising the important, check out [this link on Covey's 4 Quadrants](#).



What is **important** to you ?

## Rule 3

### Just Say “NO”, By Having a Bigger “YES”.

One of the greatest strengths a leader can have is knowing when to say “no.” It’s easy to fall into the trap of saying yes to every request, thinking it shows commitment. But every time you say yes to something unimportant, you say no to your more significant, important goals. The best leaders are clear on their “bigger yes,” and they protect it fiercely.

I used to say yes to every meeting, project, and idea that came my way, thinking it would make me more valuable. Spoiler alert, it didn’t. It just made me exhausted and ineffective. It wasn’t until I learned to say no strategically that I could focus on what made a difference, i.e. those important but not urgent tasks that made the difference over the long term.

How to Apply It: If it’s not an enthusiastic yes linked to your goals and values, it’s a hard no. Prioritise tasks that are important to you over the long term, that only YOU can do and that align with your vision and strategy. Decline or delegate the rest. Remember, every great leader knows that saying no is not about shutting down opportunities, it’s about making space for the right ones. To explore how some great leaders from the past have said no to great effect, [click here](#).



# Rule 4

## Feedback Is the Breakfast of Champions

Great feedback isn't just talk; it's the spark that ignites growth and supercharges your and your team's performance. Yet too many leaders shy away from giving and receiving feedback, fearing the discomfort of it instead of embracing the improvements it brings. The truth? Without feedback, you're just guessing, missing out on the insights that fuel your next big leap in performance.

I remember receiving some hard feedback early in my career. It stung, but it lit a fire under me and pushed me to up my game. I learned that it added extraordinary value to my team if done frequently and both ways. Don't see it as negative; see it as an opportunity to learn and grow.

How to Apply It: Use a simple tool like the SBI (Situation-Behaviour-Impact) model to give clear, constructive feedback. Describe the Situation, pinpoint the specific Behaviour, and explain its Impact on you, your team and your customers. It's simple and keeps feedback focused on actions, not personal traits. For a deeper dive into the SBI model, check out this [resource on effective feedback](#). Champions don't dodge feedback, they embrace it, knowing it keeps them at the top of their game.



# Rule 5 Don't Micromanage, Create Freedom Within A Framework

Micromanagement isn't leadership, it's control disguised as oversight. It suffocates creativity, crushes morale, and makes you look like a control freak. Research from Gallup shows that micromanagement increases employee turnover by 28%, proving that this approach is a fast track to losing your best talent and destroying your culture.

I learned this the hard way when I tried to control every project detail. I obsessed over every decision, double-checked every task, and hovered over my team like a helicopter on overdrive. The result? My team disengaged, creativity plummeted, and I did most of the work myself. It was exhausting and unsustainable and a lesson I learned early enough in my career to prevent it from becoming a showstopper.

How to Apply It: Use the "Freedom Within a Framework" approach. Provide a clear vision, define your team values, set clear goals, establish boundaries, and then step back. Allow your team the autonomy to decide how they achieve those goals. This method empowers your team, sparks innovation, and shows you trust them to get the job done. For a different take on micromanagement and how to better provide freedom within a framework, [click here](#).



# Rule 6

## Adapt and Thrive: Lead Effectively Through Change

Adaptability isn't just an option; it's a necessity in leadership. The pace of change in today's world means that what worked yesterday might be obsolete tomorrow. The most successful leaders don't just respond to change; they embrace it, create it, pivot quickly, and confidently guide their teams through the uncertainty.

I once worked with a leader who stubbornly clung to outdated strategies even as the market shifted around him. It wasn't until he started listening to fresh ideas from his team, unlearning and letting go of obsolete knowledge, that he gained new insights and began to see real progress.

How to Apply It: Develop your Adaptability Quotient (AQ) by being open to new ideas, flexible in your thinking, and resilient in the face of setbacks. For practical tips on building your AQ and embracing change, watch this [YouTube video on Adaptability: The New Competitive Advantage](#). It highlights how leaders can leverage adaptability to drive success in their teams. Remember, those who adapt don't just survive—they thrive. Adaptability is your secret weapon in leading through change, bringing about innovation, and staying ahead of the curve.



# Rule 7

## Listen Up: Your Leadership Depends on It

Excellent communication isn't just about speaking clearly, it's about listening deeply. The most impactful leaders aren't those who dominate the conversation, they're the ones who listen deeply to what is and isn't being said. Active listening is a powerful leadership tool that fosters trust, uncovers valuable insights, and strengthens team engagement. When you listen more and speak less, you empower your team, build stronger connections, and make better decisions.

I once worked with a leader who spent most meetings talking at the team, rarely stopping to ask questions or listen. Ideas, feedback, and potential solutions were lost. But with the right guidance, he flipped the script and gave more time to actively listen to the team, and engagement soared, team dynamics improved, and decision-making became sharper.

How to Apply It: Practice active listening by entirely focusing on the speaker, asking clarifying questions, and reflecting on what you've heard. For tips on mastering active listening, check out this [YouTube video on Active Listening for Leaders](#). Remember, great leaders know that listening is not a weakness, it's a leadership superpower.



# Rule 8

## Lead With Great Questions

Good leaders give answers, but great leaders ask the right questions. The power of asking the right questions goes beyond solving problems, it's about unlocking your team's potential, driving engagement, and fostering a culture of continuous learning. MIT research suggests that leaders who frequently ask questions enhance team engagement by 21%. When you lead with questions, you turn passive followers into active problem-solvers, building a more dynamic and innovative team.

I remember starting up a monthly Q&A session where I only answered team member questions. This open dialogue revealed hidden challenges, sparked fresh ideas, and shifted our culture from directive to collaborative. The impact was clear, better decisions, stronger cohesion, and a more empowered team.

For tips on mastering this skill, check out John Maxwell's new book ["Good Leaders Ask Great Questions"](#) or watch this insightful [TED Talk on the Power of Great Questions](#). Asking the right questions isn't just about finding answers—it's about unlocking your team's full potential.

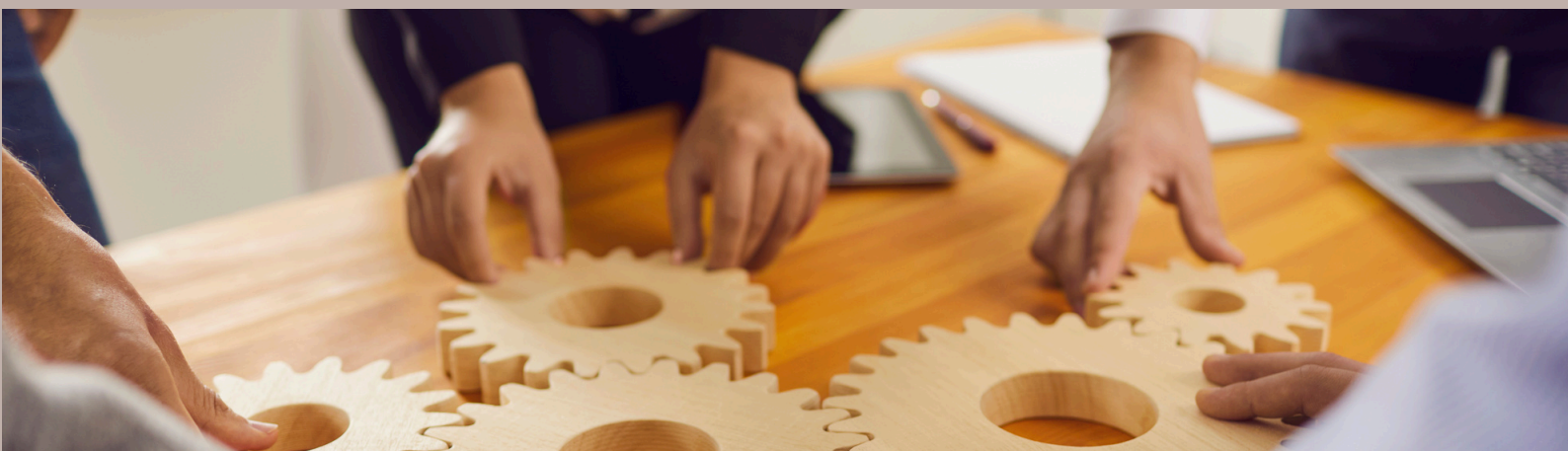


# Rule 9 Strategy Fails Without Culture

You can have the best strategy in the world, but you're doomed if your culture is toxic. Culture isn't just a buzzword, it's the foundation where the real magic happens and underpins great performance. John Kotter's research shows that strong cultures can boost business performance by 22%. A healthy culture aligns your team, fuels motivation, and drives results beyond what any strategy alone can achieve.

I once worked with a leader obsessed with strategy but completely missed the mark on culture. His plans were genius, but his team was disengaged, morale was low, and communication was poor. It was a harsh lesson for this leader that no matter how brilliant the strategy, a weak culture will sabotage it every time. Culture isn't just a nice-to-have, it's the backbone of success. Without it, even the best-laid plans fall apart.

How to Apply It: Clearly define and communicate your cultural expectations regarding behaviour and values to your team and ensure everyone, especially you, lives them daily, with no exceptions. Establish these expectations collaboratively with your team, which creates buy-in and then make sure the team holds each other accountable. For more insights on the importance of culture, check out [Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast](#), which explains the concept further.



## Rule 10 Celebrate Wins (Even the Small Ones)

You don't need to throw a parade every time someone does their job, but celebrating wins, big or small, keeps morale high and your team motivated. Recognising achievements fuels a sense of accomplishment, boosts engagement, and drives performance. Research shows that consistent recognition boosts engagement and helps teams self-govern.

I was working with a leader struggling with team morale and commitment. We discussed reward and recognition, and she surprised her team with an impromptu lunch. It wasn't a grand gesture, but the effect was immediate. The energy shifted, conversations sparked, and the atmosphere positively buzzed. It clearly shows how even simple acknowledgments can impact team dynamics and drive performance forward.

How to Apply It: Publicly recognise wins in meetings to boost motivation, send personalised thank you notes to strengthen connections or organise team outings to build bonds and improve morale. It sounds obvious, but recognising and celebrating small achievements can boost morale, enhance motivation, and create team momentum. For more on the power of celebrating small wins, check out "[To Achieve Success, Start Detecting Your Small Wins](#)".



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## Conclusion

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These ten rules are not groundbreaking. They are just some of the foundational building blocks of great leadership. From managing things and leading people to embracing feedback and celebrating wins, these essentials are the bedrock of your leadership toolkit. Remember, it's about prioritising what's important over what's urgent, saying no when it doesn't align with your goals, and being adaptable in a constantly changing world.

If you are ready to take your leadership to the next level, sign up for our email list to receive exclusive tips, resources, and insights for leaders.

Don't miss the chance to become part of our leadership community. Visit our website and join us today!





## Resources

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Visit my website: [www.bexceptional.com.au](http://www.bexceptional.com.au)

Email: [simeonboseley@bexceptional.com.au](mailto:simeonboseley@bexceptional.com.au)

### **Books:**

- “Dare to Lead” by Brené Brown
- “Leaders Eat Last” by Simon Sinek
- “Extreme Ownership” by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin
- “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” by Patrick Lencioni -
- “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership” by John Maxwell -
- “Good Power” by Ginni Rometty