

From:

The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader
By John C. Maxwell

C O M M I T M E N T :

I T S E P A R A T E S D O E R S F R O M D R E A M E R S

People do not follow uncommitted leaders.

Commitment can be displayed in a full range of matters to include the work hours you choose to maintain, how you work to improve your abilities, or what you do for your fellow workers at personal sacrifice.

—*Stephen Gregg,*
Chairman and CEO of Ethix Corp.

He who has done his best
for his own time has lived for all times.

—*Johann von Schiller, Playwright*

O L D B E F O R E H I S T I M E

A couple of years ago, my wife, Margaret, and I had the opportunity to vacation in Italy. Our two greatest priorities were food and art. To find the finest food, we talked to friends who had been there. To see the finest artwork, we enlisted the help of a fantastic guide who is a buyer for New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. During that tour we saw many great pieces of artwork. But none struck me the way Michelangelo's *David* did. That's when I understood why it is called a masterpiece.

Michelangelo lived an incredible life. Possibly the greatest artist of Western civilization—and certainly the most influential—he was born to sculpt. He once said that when he drank his wet nurse's milk as a baby, along with it came a love for the stonecutter's tools. He sculpted his first mature masterpiece at age twenty-one. He completed his *Pietà* and *David* before age thirty.

In his early thirties, Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II to sculpt a magnificent papal tomb, but was then asked to work on a painting project instead. At first Michelangelo wanted to refuse, having no desire to paint a dozen figures on the ceiling of a small chapel in the Vatican. Though as a boy he had been trained to paint, his passion was sculpture. But when the pope pressed him, he reluctantly accepted the assignment.

Scholars believe Michelangelo's rivals pushed for him to get the job, hoping he would refuse it and lose favor with the pope,

or take it and discredit himself. But once Michelangelo accepted the assignment, he thoroughly committed himself to it, expanding the project from a simple depiction of the twelve apostles to include more than four hundred figures and nine scenes from the book of Genesis.

For four grueling years, the artist lay on his back painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. And he paid a great price. The work permanently damaged his eyesight and wore him down. Michelangelo said, "After four tortured years, more than four hundred over-life-sized figures, I felt as old and as weary as Jeremiah. I was only thirty-seven, yet friends did not recognize the old man I had become."

The impact of Michelangelo's commitment was far-reaching. He pleased his benefactor, the pope, and received other commissions from the Vatican. But more important, he made a huge impact in the artistic community. His Sistine Chapel frescoes were so boldly painted, so original, so exquisitely executed that they caused many fellow artists, including the gifted painter Raphael, to alter their style. Art historians maintain that Michelangelo's masterpiece forever changed the course of painting in Europe. And it laid a foundation for his equally important impact on sculpture and architecture.

Undoubtedly Michelangelo's talent created the potential for greatness, but without commitment, his influence would have been minimal. That level of commitment could be seen in his attention to the fine details as well as the overarching vision. When asked why he was working so diligently on a dark corner

of the Sistine Chapel that no one would ever see, Michelangelo's simple reply was, "God will see."

F L E S H I N G I T O U T

The world has never seen a great leader who lacked commitment. Ed McElroy of USAir spoke of its importance: "Commitment gives us new power. No matter what comes to us—sickness, poverty, or disaster—we never turn our eye from the goal."

What is commitment? To each person, it means something different:

To the boxer, it's getting off the mat one time more than you've been knocked down.

To the marathoner, it's running another ten miles when your strength is gone.

To the soldier, it's going over the hill, not knowing what's waiting on the other side.

To the missionary, it's saying good-bye to your own comfort to make life better for others.

To the leader, it's all that and more because everyone you lead is depending on you.

If you want to be an effective leader, you have to be committed. True commitment inspires and attracts people. It shows them that you have conviction. They will believe in you only if

you believe in your cause. As the Law of Buy-In states, people buy into the leader, then the vision.

What is the true nature of commitment? Take a look at three observations.

1. Commitment Starts in the Heart

Some people want everything to be perfect before they're willing to commit themselves to anything. But commitment always precedes achievement. I am told that in the Kentucky Derby, the winning horse effectively runs out of oxygen after the first half mile, and he goes the rest of the way on heart. That's why all great athletes recognize its importance. NBA legend Michael Jordan explains that "heart is what separates the good from the great." If you want to make a difference in *other* people's lives as a leader, look into *your* heart to see if you're really committed.

2. Commitment Is Tested by Action

It's one thing to talk about commitment. It's another to do something about it. The only *real* measure of commitment is action. Arthur Gordon acknowledged, "Nothing is easier than saying words. Nothing is harder than living them day after day."

Someone told me about a newly elected judge who had won office in a special county election. During his acceptance speech, he said, "I wish to thank the 424 people who promised to vote for me. I wish to thank the 316 people who said that they did vote for me. I wish to thank the 47 people who came out last Thursday to vote, and I wish to thank the 26 folks who actually

did vote for me.” How are you doing when it comes to following through on your commitments?

3. *Commitment Opens the Door to Achievement*

As a leader, you will face plenty of obstacles and opposition—if you don’t already. And there will be times when commitment is the only thing that carries you forward. David McNally commented, “Commitment is the enemy of resistance, for it is the serious promise to press on, to get up, no matter how many times you are knocked down.” If you want to get anywhere worthwhile, you must be committed.

REFLECTING ON IT

When it comes to commitment, there are really only four types of people:

1. *Cop-outs*. People who have no goals and do not commit.
2. *Holdouts*. People who don’t know if they can reach their goals, so they’re afraid to commit.
3. *Dropouts*. People who start toward a goal but quit when the going gets tough.
4. *All-outs*. People who set goals, commit to them, and pay the price to reach them.

What kind of person are you? Have you been reaching your goals? Are you achieving all that you believe you can? Do people believe in you and follow you readily? If your answer to any of these questions is no, the problem may be your level of commitment.

BRINGING IT HOME

To improve your commitment, do the following:

- *Measure it.* Sometimes we *think* we are committed to something, yet our actions indicate otherwise. Take out your calendar and your checkbook register. Spend a few hours tallying up how you spend your time and where you spend your money. Look at how much time you spend at work, in service, with family, in health and recreation activities, and so forth. Figure out how much money you spent on living expenses, entertainment, personal development, and giving. All these things are true measures of your commitment. You may be surprised by what you find.
- *Know what's worth dying for.* One of the questions every leader must ask himself is, What am I willing to die for? If it came down to it, what in life would you not be able to stop doing, no matter what the consequences were? Spend some time alone meditating on that thought. Write down what you discover. Then see if your actions match your ideals.

- *Use the Edison method.* If taking the first step toward commitment is a problem, try doing what Thomas Edison did. When he had a good idea for an invention, he would call a press conference to announce it. Then he'd go into his lab and invent it. Make your plans public, and you might be more committed to following through with them.

D A I L Y T A K E - A W A Y

Former pro basketball player Bill Bradley attended a summer basketball camp at age fifteen conducted by "Easy" Ed Macauley. During that camp, Macauley made a statement that changed Bradley's life: "Just remember that if you're not working at your game to the utmost of your ability, there will be someone out there somewhere with equal ability. And one day you'll play each other, and he'll have the advantage." How do you measure up against that standard?