

**From:**

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

R E S P O N S I B I L I T Y :  
I F Y O U W O N ' T C A R R Y T H E B A L L ,  
Y O U C A N ' T L E A D T H E T E A M

Success on any major scale requires you  
to accept responsibility . . . In the final analysis,  
the one quality that all successful people have  
is the ability to take on responsibility.

—Michael Korda,  
*Editor-in-chief of Simon & Schuster*

A leader can give up anything—  
except final responsibility.

—John C. Maxwell

## T H E A L A M O R E V I S I T E D

In late 1835, a group of Texas rebels lay siege to a small mission-turned-fort in San Antonio, Texas. By the end of the year, the Mexican soldiers in it surrendered and headed south, leaving the fort in the rebels' hands. The name of the old church building was the Alamo.

That action set the stage for one of the great heroic events in United States history. The battle that occurred there in February and March of the following year is a story of valor and incredible responsibility.

The battle at the Alamo between American settlers and the Mexican army was inevitable. For twenty-five years, the citizens of Texas repeatedly attempted to gain their independence from the Mexican government. And each time Mexican troops were promptly dispatched to suppress the rebellion. But this time it was different. The fort was manned by a resolute group of 183 volunteers, including seasoned soldiers and frontiersmen William Travis, Davy Crockett, and Jim Bowie. Their motto was "Victory or Death."

In late February, several thousand Mexican soldiers under the command of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna marched on San Antonio and lay siege to the Alamo. When the Mexicans offered them terms for surrender, the rebel defenders held firm. And when the enemy told them they would be given no quarter if they fought, the Americans would not be moved.

When it became certain that battle was inevitable, the

Texans sent a young man out to try to bring back reinforcements from the Texas army. His name was James Bonham. He slipped out of the old mission at night and made his way ninety-five miles to Goliad for help. But when he arrived, he was told that no troops were available.

For eleven days Santa Anna pounded away at the Alamo. And on the morning of March 6, 1836, the Mexican army stormed the old mission. At the end of the battle, not a single man of the 183 defenders lived. But they had managed to take six hundred enemy soldiers to the grave with them.

And what happened to James Bonham, the messenger who had been sent to Goliad? It would have been easy for Bonham to simply ride away. But his sense of responsibility was too great. Instead he rode back to the Alamo, made his way through enemy lines, and joined his comrades so that he could stand, fight, and die with them.

Though the Americans were defeated at the Alamo, that battle was the turning point in the war with Mexico. "Remember the Alamo" became the cry in subsequent battles, rallying support against General Santa Anna and his troops. Less than two months later, Texas secured its independence.

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

Rarely in American culture today do you see the kind of responsibility displayed by James Bonham and his companions. People now focus more on their rights than on their responsibilities.

Reflecting on current attitudes, my friend Haddon Robinson observes, “If you want to get rich, invest in victimization. It is America’s fastest growing industry.” He points out that millions of people are becoming rich by identifying, representing, interviewing, treating, insuring, and counseling victims.

Good leaders never embrace a victim mentality. They recognize that who and where they are remain their responsibility—not that of their parents, their spouses, their children, the government, their bosses, or their coworkers. They face whatever life throws at them and give it their best, knowing that they will get an opportunity to lead the team only if they’ve proved that they can carry the ball.

Take a look at the following characteristics of people who embrace responsibility:

*1. They Get the Job Done*

In a study of self-made millionaires, Dr. Thomas Stanley of the University of Georgia found that they all have one thing in common: they work hard. One millionaire was asked why he worked twelve to fourteen hours a day. He answered, “It took me fifteen years, working for a large organization, to realize that in our society you work eight hours a day for survival, and if you work only eight hours a day, all you do is survive . . . Everything over eight hours is an investment in your future.” No one can do the minimum and reach his maximum potential.

How do people maintain a get-it-done attitude? They think of themselves as self-employed. If you want to achieve more and

build your credibility with followers, adopt that mind-set. It can take you far.

*2. They Are Willing to Go the Extra Mile*

Responsible people never protest, “That’s not my job.” They’re willing to do whatever it takes to complete the work needed by the organization. If you want to succeed, be willing to put the organization ahead of your agenda.

*3. They Are Driven by Excellence*

Excellence is a great motivator. People who desire excellence—and work hard to achieve it—are almost always responsible. And when they give their all, they live at peace. Success expert Jim Rohn says, “Stress comes from doing less than you can.” Make high quality your goal, and responsibility will naturally follow.

*4. They Produce Regardless of the Situation*

The ultimate quality of a responsible person is the ability to finish. In *An Open Road*, Richard L. Evans writes, “It is priceless to find a person who will take responsibility, who will finish and follow through to the final detail—to know when someone has accepted an assignment that it will be effectively, conscientiously completed.” If you want to lead, you’ve got to produce.

R E F L E C T I N G   O N   I T

Gilbert Arland offers this advice: “When an archer misses the mark he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to

hit the bull's-eye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim, improve yourself.”

Are you on target when it comes to responsibility? Do others see you as a finisher? Do people look to you to carry the ball in pressure situations? Are you known for excellence? If you haven't been performing at the highest level, you may need to cultivate a stronger sense of responsibility.

#### BRINGING IT HOME

To improve your responsibility, do the following:

- *Keep hanging in there.* Sometimes an inability to deliver despite difficult circumstances can be due to a persistence problem. The next time you find yourself in a situation where you're going to miss a deadline, lose a deal, or fail to get a program off the ground, stop and figure out how to succeed. Think outside the lines. Can you work through the night? Can you call a colleague to help you? Can you hire a staff member or find a volunteer to help? Creativity can bring responsibility to life.
- *Admit what's not good enough.* If you have trouble achieving excellence, maybe you've lowered your standards. Look at your personal life for places where you've let things slip. Then make changes to set higher standards. It will help you to reset the bar of excellence for yourself.

- *Find better tools.* If you find that your standards are high, your attitude is good, and you consistently work hard—and you still don't achieve the way you'd like—get better equipped. Improve your skills by taking classes, reading books, and listening to tapes. Find a mentor. Do whatever it takes to become better at what you do.

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

An inmate at Butte County Jail in California explained his absence from jail to sheriff's deputies in this way: "I was playing pole vault and I got too close to the wall and I fell over the wall. When I regained my senses, I ran around to try and find a way back in, but being unfamiliar with the area, got lost. Next thing I knew I was in Chico." People seldom realize how weak *their* excuses are until they hear some from others.