5 QUESTIONS ON THE 5 LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MAXWELL



John Maxwell

Yesterday, [John Maxwell’s](http://johnmaxwellonleadership.com/) newest book, [***The Five Levels of Leadership***](http://tmlive.us/oYQoCk), was released. I caught up with John a few days ago and asked him several questions about the book. Here’s our interview. Check out the opportunity to win a free copy at the end of the article.

**TONY:** What prompted you to write *The Five Levels of Leadership*?

**JOHN:** In the early 1980s, I hit a wall in my productivity as a leader. I realized I needed to shift from leading followers to developing leaders. Since leadership is influence, this got me thinking about the nature of influence. What emerged from that study is what I called the 5 Levels of Influence (later renamed 5 Levels of Leadership). And I began using it to help others understand how influence works and begin developing themselves as leaders.

In almost 30 years of teaching 5 Levels of Leadership, it gradually became my most requested lesson. And that demand prompted me to go back and really dig into it, to see if it could be expanded into a book. To my delight, I realized that there was plenty of content, and I could’ve written more about it than I did.

**TONY:** I know that Jim Collins wrote about “Level 5″ leadership in *Good to Great*. What did Jim get wrong on this topic?

**JOHN:** I don’t think he got anything wrong. It’s just a different way of looking at leaders. His level 5 hierarchy is very different from my 5 Levels of Leadership. What he’s really talking about is five levels of contribution or individual growth. And he focuses mostly on his Level 5, but doesn’t really go into the other levels at all. His levels are also not sequential. Bottom line: I think Jim and I just happened to use the same terminology, but it’s a different perspective on the subject.

My 5 levels is not only a picture of leadership, but also the process of how leadership works: How a leader starts with a Position, then has to gain Permission to lead by developing relationships. Then they have to achieve Productivity by getting results with the team. That earns them the credibility to begin People Development so others can reach their potential. Finally, at Level 5, the Pinnacle, they develop leaders who develop leaders.

**TONY:** Do you think it’s possible for anyone to become a “Level 5″ leader?

**JOHN:** Anyone? Potentially, yes. In reality, not everyone will reach Level 5. Leadership is difficult. And then it’s very difficult to develop leaders who can lead in their own right. But to develop leaders who can develop others into high level leaders? Very few can do that. It takes skill, focus, and a lifetime devotion to it. Most people would rather produce than produce leaders.

Now, do Level 5 leaders exist? Yes. I can think of a few well-known Level 5 leaders, like Nelson Mandela. Mother Teresa. John Wooden, who I profile in the book.

**TONY:** What if we see someone on our team that’s stuck in their leadership? What’s our responsibility?

**JOHN:** If you’re their leader, it’s your responsibility to develop them. But whether you can actually help them grow (Level 4) depends on whether you have worked through the other levels with them. If I’m a positional leader (Level 1) and can see the problem, but have done nothing to gain their permission (Level 2) or achieve productivity with them (Level 3), I won’t be able to help because I won’t have the credibility to speak into their life. If I’m going to help them, I need to earn the influence with them. Otherwise, I may be part of the problem. I might have the desire to help, but not the credibility.

**TONY:** Talk specifically to church leaders. Why is this topic so important to the future of the Church?

**JOHN:** Well, the 5 Levels were birthed in a church environment, in part because it’s a volunteer environment. It’s always harder to lead volunteers than staff, because you have to gain influence with them if you expect them to follow. By moving up the levels, a church leader can influence his or her people more and more, and together they can advance the Kingdom.

I appreciate John sharing his thoughts. And, I appreciate his gift to my readers. I have five copies of John’s new book to give away. To participate, you need to live in the United States or Canada. And, if you win, you will need to provide a street address rather than a PO Box for delivery. If you’d like to win one of the five copies, leave a comment on this post. I’ll select the five winners by Friday at 5:00 pm EDT.