M-01 · MANUAL

No Big Speeches

A practical guide to leading people, not impressing them.

A leadership manual about what a leader owes their team. Fifteen parts of short sayings you can recall in the moment, each with what it means and what it looks like in practice.

signal by Travis Loudin

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01 Foundations

Everything else in this manual rests on one idea: people follow leaders they trust, and they hold themselves accountable to teams they believe in.

FN-001 Accountability is built on trust.

FN-002 Trust = (Credibility + Reliability + Intimacy) ÷ Self-Orientation

FN-003 “Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.”

02 The Lightning Rod

Owning outcomes

When something goes wrong, the leader absorbs the strike so the team doesn't get burned. Ownership upward, problem-solving downward.

FN-004 “Take the blame and share the credit.”

FN-005 “There are no bad teams, only bad leaders.”

FN-006 “Fix the problem, not the blame.”

03 The Shield

Protecting focus

Deep technical work needs long, quiet stretches. The leader's job is to absorb noise, churn and shifting priorities so the team can build.

FN-007 “Be an umbrella, not a funnel.”

FN-008 “Maker's schedule, manager's schedule.”

FN-009 “Every yes is a no to something else.”

FN-010 Triage rotation

FN-011 “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them.”

FN-012 Pride of workmanship

FN-013 “What do I do that wastes your time without contributing to your effectiveness?”

FN-014 Remove impediments

FN-015 The three-email rule

04 The Cheerleader

Making wins visible

Good work that nobody notices feels a lot like work that doesn't matter. Recognition is fuel, and the leader controls the supply.

FN-016 “Praise in public, correct in private.”

FN-017 “Catch people doing something right.”

FN-018 “What gets recognized gets repeated.”

FN-019 The progress principle

FN-020 Praise the effort and the approach, not just the talent.

FN-021 Specific beats generic

05 The Faith Builder

Trust in you, each other and the mission

A team performs when people believe three things: their leader has their back, their teammates will come through, and the work is worth doing.

FN-022 “Say what you'll do, then do what you say.”

FN-023 “Trust is built in drops and lost in buckets.”

FN-024 Psychological safety

FN-025 “No brilliant jerks.”

FN-026 “Assume positive intent.”

FN-027 “Start with why.”

FN-028 “Context, not control.”

FN-029 Commander's intent

FN-030 “Disagree and commit.”

06 In the Trenches

No job beneath you

Credibility comes from showing up for the hard, boring and unpopular work, not just the decisions. It also means knowing when your hands in the work start getting in the way.

FN-031 “Never ask your team to do something you wouldn't do yourself.”

FN-032 “Leaders eat last.”

FN-033 “Lead from the front.”

FN-034 Go and see

FN-035 “Eat your own dog food.”

FN-036 A manager's output is the output of the organization under them.

FN-037 “If each of us hires people who are smaller than we are, we shall become a company of dwarfs. But if each of us hires people who are bigger than we are, we shall become a company of giants.”

FN-038 Multipliers and diminishers

FN-039 “The conductor doesn't make a sound.”

FN-040 “What got you here won't get you there.”

FN-041 Build on strengths.

07 Accountability Done Right

Most accountability failures start as expectation failures. Get the expectations right and accountability becomes a conversation, not a confrontation.

FN-042 “Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.”

FN-043 “Who does what by when.”

FN-044 “Inspect what you expect.”

FN-045 “Trust, but verify.”

FN-046 “The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.”

FN-047 “No surprises.”

FN-048 Hold yourself accountable first

08 Hard Conversations and Feedback

Support without honesty slowly turns into enabling. Caring about someone includes telling them what they need to hear, early and kindly.

FN-049 Ruinous empathy

FN-050 “Bad news doesn't get better with age.”

FN-051 Situation, Behavior, Impact (SBI)

FN-052 “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

FN-053 Crucial conversations

FN-054 “Feedback is a gift.”

FN-055 Don't let a clear mismatch linger.

09 Growing People

The long-term measure of a leader is how many people grew under them. Coaching, stretching and adapting to each person is the work.

FN-056 The one-on-one is their meeting, not yours.

FN-057 “Stay curious a little longer.”

FN-058 Task-relevant maturity

FN-059 Autonomy, mastery and purpose

FN-060 “People leave managers, not companies.”

FN-061 “Not everyone wants to be a manager.”

FN-062 “Delegate outcomes, not tasks.”

FN-063 “Work yourself out of a job.”

10 Leading Through Change

Reorganizations, acquisitions, new systems and new leadership all create uncertainty. During change, the team watches the leader more closely than at any other time.

FN-064 “In the absence of information, people assume the worst.”

FN-065 “Say what you know, what you don't know, and when you'll know more.”

FN-066 Undercommunicating the vision

FN-067 Change is external. Transition is internal.

FN-068 “Be a thermostat, not a thermometer.”

FN-069 “Nothing about me without me.”

11 Decisions and Priorities

A slow decision blocks a whole team. Good leaders match the speed of a decision to how reversible it is, and push decisions down to the people closest to the work.

FN-070 One-way doors and two-way doors

FN-071 “A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week.”

FN-072 “Not deciding is a decision.”

FN-073 Escalate misalignment early

FN-074 Decentralized command

FN-075 “What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important.”

FN-076 “Strong opinions, weakly held.”

FN-077 The pre-mortem

FN-078 “Hope is not a strategy.”

12 Leading Up and Across

A lot of what a team experiences as "good leadership" happens in rooms they're not in. Advocacy, translation and relationships with peers decide what resources and reputation the team gets.

FN-079 “Advocate for your people when they're not in the room.”

FN-080 Sponsor, don't just mentor

FN-081 “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

FN-082 Amplification

FN-083 “Nobody cares how the sausage is made.”

FN-084 Your first team is your peer team.

FN-085 “No surprises.”

FN-086 “Dig your well before you're thirsty.”

FN-087 Glue work

FN-088 Defend the invisible work

13 Leading Tech Teams

Software and IT have their own well-known laws. Each one carries a leadership lesson that non-technical leaders often miss.

Thirteen well-known laws, many from software and IT, each paired with what it means for the people on a team.

14 Leading Yourself

A team can't be steadier than its leader. Your energy, humility and habits set the ceiling for everyone else's.

FN-089 Sustainable pace

FN-090 “Your habits become their expectations.”

FN-091 “You can't pour from an empty cup.”

FN-092 "I don't know" and "I was wrong."

FN-093 “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.”

FN-094 “Respond, don't react.”

FN-095 Find your own support

15 Traps and Anti-Patterns

Most leadership failures come from good intentions applied badly. These are the common ones, with what to do instead.

Thirteen common leadership traps, each with what it looks like and what to do instead.

WHERE TO FIND IT

signal.travisloudin.com/manuals/leadership

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