When my boss asked me to become a member of the executive team, I said "yes" but I knew I had some challenges ahead of me. There were many leadership lessons I needed to learn to step into the role of Vice President of Sales at CCB Technology. Basically, I didn’t want to throw a wrench into the engine of CCB.

I consumed tons of content from leaders who were way ahead of me, perspective and advice were two much needed things. Through podcasts, audio books and face to face conversations I gleaned some priceless council. As with anything though, being in it is a lot different than reading about it.

Here’s what I learned in my first year as an executive.

### **Rewards and difficulties of leadership**

Anyone that has been in management for more than 13 minutes knows how it can be when trying to lead well. Sometimes you feel like First Lieutenant [Dick Winters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Winters), leading troops into enemy territory and overcoming enormous opposition. (Band of Brothers, one of the greatest shows in the history of mankind portrayed Lieutenant Winters' service.)

Then there are times your life feels like the final scene of *There Will Be Blood*. Your goals are standing over you like Daniel Day-Lewis yelling [“I Drink Your Milkshake!”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_hFTR6qyEo) and you have no clue what just happened… but your pretty certain insanity is present.

### **“Everything rises and falls on leadership”**

So what's the point? [John C. Maxwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Maxwell), a pastor, author, and leadership speaker, said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”

That statement is sobering and exciting to me in my role as the VP of Sales. I’ve been given the opportunity to bring people together, cast vision and ultimately find out what I’m made of.

If everything rises and falls on leadership, I needed to ask myself some questions… Am I really committed to **SERVANT LEADERSHIP 🡨link to Jon’s episode**? Do I care if my people like where they work? Are humility, integrity, passion, hunger and fun, core pieces of who I am or just words for a corporate poster? Will I own my mistakes or push my team under the bus as it passes?

There are a hundred questions like these that have passed through my head but ultimately, I keep coming back to one in particular: **Am I worthy of having followers?**

\*Clarification: when I say ‘followers’ I’m not talking about social media type followers that think my posts are funny or ‘like’ them. I’m talking about people that look to me as a leader – not because of a title change– but because of influence.

The question of worthiness has pushed me forward in dozens of small circumstances, but it has also caused me to venture into areas that I might have otherwise sidestepped.

I’ve never been afraid of having the bat in my hands when the game is on the line. I LOVE that kind of [pressure](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/thomas_carlyle_120678)!! I prefer that situation because I have confidence in my skill set and feel a degree of control over the outcome. The game is in my hands.

The analogy starts to break down from there though because that isn’t how it works when you have a team reporting to you. Even if I hit a ‘walk-off home-run’, it doesn’t mean my teammates will follow me or that I’ll have influence over them.

What do I do? Throw my hands up and say it’s not worth it? Cut corners and play the [game for myself](https://www.si.com/more-sports/photos/2007/08/08sis-barry-bonds-covers#3)? Or… do I learn all I can about leadership and hone my skills?

## ****Leadership Lessons: “No one drifts into excellence”****

When my pastor, [Mike Bullmore](http://cwc.church/leadership/mike-bullmore/), says something – people sit up straight and take notice. Not because of his title, the degrees he’s obtained or some fire and brimstone intimidation factor. He’s one of the most humble men I’ve ever met, and yet, in almost every interaction I’ve had with Mike, he’s been direct, inquisitive, and approachable. If Mike gives advice, you know it’s for your edification. So when I heard him say in a sermon, “no one drifts into excellence”, it caused me to pause and literally take note. The context wasn’t business, but the lesson applies.

Jerry Rice, Warren Buffet, Michael Phelps, Whitney Houston, Michael Jordan, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Jerry Seinfeld…none of these people drifted to the top of their profession. They trained, studied, bombed, air-balled, forgot the words, practiced and then did it again and again. It takes work to make it look easy.

**Here’s a few things I did in my 1st year as VP to put what I was learning into practice.**

1. Write down yearly goals
2. Break down the yearly goals into smaller, quarterly goals
3. Establish disciplines that, if followed, will help to hit quarterly goals
4. Write down the frequency each discipline will be practiced
5. Start

Seems simple, except I’m not that good. I learned in Michael Hyatt’s [Seven Principles for Setting Goals at Work](https://michaelhyatt.com/seven-principles-for-setting-goals/) and am using his [full focus planner](https://fullfocusplanner.com/?v) as my personal trainer. It’s tough… but it’s working. For whatever reason, the simple act of writing down the disciplines many times a week/month…etc. keeps me accountable. A nice side effect of doing this has been relief at the end of each week. When I look back at all I’ve written down, I see things accomplished that actually matter. And somehow when I put first things first my inbox of several 100 messages is cleared also.\*

\*It’s not magic and it doesn’t happen 100% of the time. Some weeks blow up and late nights of catching up are needed.

At about the two-week mark of using the planner, I added a sixth step to the above five.

Tell my wife, boss & team what I’m doing. Risky.

Now I’ve got 20-ish people involved in the process instead of just me. If I slip, I’ve got a bunch of people that will notice. The pessimistic side of me started to think I was going to have micro-mangers at every turn – the opposite has been true.

Questions came up because they were intrigued. Not because they were trying to catch me losing. Wait! What?! Yep. I backed into gaining a few cheerleaders who seemed to feel like they were part of my progress.

One Saturday my wife mentioned she noticed a big difference in how I was interacting with the kids since I started getting up early to workout, read…etc. as opposed to staying in bed, getting a little more sleep, and rushing out the door in the morning.

Guess what one of my disciplines was? Yep again. Wake up 60 minutes before the kids so that I can drink a glass of water with apple cider vinegar, work out, read, and make breakfast for the family. Five times a week.

That got me thinking about what happened when I wasn’t intentional with my schedule. I drowned in calendar invites and by the weekend I was irritated and distracted by my inbox of unread emails. By increasing ‘focused intentionality’ on my schedule, there was an impact on my home life and how I felt physically. (Maybe the extra effort is going to be worth it.)

Fast forward a few more weeks and as I look around the room during a meeting I see two people with my same planner. Being the sick individual I am, my first thought was that they were pulling a prank on me or something. Turns out they were listening and watching.

### **I still have so much to learn!**

Having a wife, four kids (oldest is 10), being a new executive and still wanting to play softball occasionally, is tough to balance. It’s not easy but it’s worth the effort.

Maybe you decide to not watch Netflix until the weekend and instead listen to a book on Audible. Or how about popping in the earbuds when you wash dishes and check out a [podcast](https://podcast.impactofleadership.com/)? How can you use the whitespace in your drive to work? Should you get the kids lunches and your work clothes ready the night before?

I’m convinced I’ll never have this leadership thing mastered. Every time I learn something, it seems I’ve got three more lessons waiting for me. Maybe that’s why I’m drawn to it.

Asking myself again today, “Am I worthy of having followers?” my answer is a little different than it was in my first few days as a VP and I’m good with it.**I’m not there yet but I’m on my way.**

If you identify with what I’ve mentioned, I’d love to connect with you and hear what tools you’re discovering.

**Need More?**

Read about the resources I tapped into when [preparing for a leadership role](https://impactofleadership.com/resources/33418/preparing-for-a-leadership-role)
Check out our [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqhqwYDq79KQBOgyGko6bTg) and [Linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/impact-of-leadership) pages for more encouraging content.

Listen to episode #82 with former SEAL and FBI special agent [Errol Doebler](https://podcast.impactofleadership.com/podcast/process-art-science-of-leadership-errol-doebler/).

Take your growth as a leader to the next level, join the [Impact of Leadership Community](https://impactofleadership.com/) today!