I have been on this spinning, big blue orb for 55 years now. That is
time enough to have learned a few things. I consider myself a pretty smart
guy. However, I am constantly amazed by how stupid I was two years ago
—and the cycle repeats. Yet, every once in a while, I hear or read
something that takes me aback and I simply must write it down. Here it is:
“You must learn to place less value on all that you can remember and more
on those few things that you must never forget.” Marcus Buckingham wrote
that in his terrific 2005 book, *The One Thing You Need to Know: …About
Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success.*

In my first 30 years, I had a lot of horrible bosses and a few really
great ones. The very best managers stand out. They get talked about. We
all know who they are. We might not agree with what they say or do or
understand why they do what they do, but we like how they make us feel. I
have the extreme honor of being hired by some really great managers and
leaders. I pay attention. I watch what they do and say. I listen to the
language they use with others and with themselves. I write it all down.

Do you remember the Billy Crystal movie *City Slickers*? Jack
Palance’s pitch-perfect character, “Curly”, is the grizzled, stone-faced loner
and ranch trail boss, a real cowboy. He steals every scene he is in. Billy’s
character is Mitch Robbins, a clueless city slicker trying to build rapport and
engage Curly in conversation, but without much luck. Finally, Curly tells
Mitch, “The secret [of success] in life is just one thing.” Curious, Mitch asks,
“What is that?” Smiling as he rolls another cigarette, Curly replies, “That’s
your job to find out what that one thing is.” Mine is writing and speaking. It
took me 32 years to figure it out. In their 1983 LP, U2 front man Bono
laments, “I still haven’t found what I am looking for.” Most people haven’t
either.

A manager is not the same thing as a leader. Managers manage
people. It’s one-to-one. A manager grows people. He inspires change,
coaches up, teaches specific skills, and encourages people to take risks
and stretch comfort zones. He brings out the best in people. He truly cares
about the people he serves. It really is true: You can have everything you
want in life if you only first help enough other people get what they want or need.

Here is my list of 10 Disciplines/10 Principles/10 Commandments to master. They represent the things we must never forget if we are managers. It might not be a complete list, but it’s a great start. Think of them as ten goals to master over the next five years.

1. Fall in Love With Your Work (Organization and Industry)
   Great managers love their job. They are proud of the company they work for. They are hard working and loyal. They take 100 percent responsibility for their actions and decisions. They are at once coaches, teachers, and servant leaders who teach by able example. Great managers smile a lot. They seem to genuinely love what they do and wouldn’t dream of doing anything else. Their attitude is contagious. They talk about their work away from the job. They love talking with other managers in their industry and are always looking for, and finding, new and better ways of getting things done. If you do what you love, you’ll never work another day in your life.

2. Become A Lifelong Student
   Great managers read books and trade magazines. The books you don’t read won’t help. They attend every seminar they can. They are sponges for any information that will help them reach their goals. Great managers pick the brains of other people who are more successful. They find mentors. They keep a journal to capture lessons and ideas, and they borrow boldly from the best. They practice the “Hour of Power”: 20 minutes Reading, 20 minutes Planning, and 20 minutes Thinking and Affirming their goals every morning (or evening) without fail.

3. Get Great At Sales (and Marketing)
   Everyone is in sales. The only question is, “How good are you at it?” Selling is both a science and an art. The science is in the math. What is your close ratio? Out of ten prospective deals, how many do you close? Do you close 10 percent, 20 percent, or 50 percent? You need to know. That is how you track your progress and skill. You are either green and growing or ripe and rotting. There is no neutral in business. The art is the people side of the equation. We make buying decisions based on emotion and justify them with logic. Selling is like a chair with four legs: Trust, Relationships,
Competence, and Timing. People buy from people they like, trust, and believe. How good are you at asking great open-ended questions and actively listening? As a manager, you are selling all day long. You sell internal customers (associates) on the company values, ideology and vision. You sell external customers who give you the chance to demonstrate your competency. We are all in sales. How good are you at it?

4. Know Thyself (and Others)

What is the best and highest use of your time and talent? One secret of successful managers is they know and understand their gifts and strengths. At the same time, they are brutally honest about their shortcomings and weaknesses. They invest most of their time in the things they are good at and delegate those tasks that are their weaknesses. They solicit feedback from technology (MMPI, DISC, personality profiles, etc.), the people they serve, and the people they report to. They are flexible, willing, and able to change. They are change masters. They have thick skin and cold blood. They are serious about improving and pay the price in advance.

5. Set Big Hairy Audacious Goals (and Lots of Little Ones, Too!)

Great managers set BIG Goals like “Increase sales by 30 percent this year while maintaining a gross profit of 40 percent!” They have crystal clear expectations of each job and employee. They create clear job descriptions and walk through each bullet point with each associate. “What do you get paid to do?” is a vital question! If you ask a receptionist, she might say, “I get paid to answer the phone.” “No,” you say in a kind soft tone, “you get paid to solve clients’ problems by telephone and do whatever it takes to delight them.” Focus on WHAT you want and WHY! Leave the HOW up to the employees. First we work on goals and then they work on us. Be absolutely clear on your expectations of yourself and others. Peter Drucker said, “What is your contribution to the organization?”

6. Track and Measure Everything

As a sales manager, your goals need to be made clear by publicly posting both the goals and activity, month by month, in a public place. For example, everyone needs to know: “Mark Matteson sold $75,000 and is 300 percent of sales plan!” How many service agreements were sold? What about projects? How many did you lose last year? The term “churn” is
the percentage of clients who left measured against the total. Less than five percent is great, but more than 10 percent is bad! Where performance is measured, performance improves. What are you measuring?

7. Reward Behavior You Want Repeated (the Window and the Mirror)

Whatever gets rewarded gets repeated. Whatever gets punished stops. That is the greatest management principle in the world. What do you want to see more of? What do you want to see less of? Praise pays. High-fives in the hallway, ringing of the bell, awards, trophies, plaques, and cold hard cash given in public settings, like annual meetings or monthly meetings, matter to the people you manage. You are making a statement. Get creative and make the acknowledgment public. Reward the Sales Star of the Month with movie coupons, dinner credit cards, or paid time off. Remember the Window and the Mirror: When it comes time to take credit for the success, look out the window and give it away—to your team! When it comes time to assess blame, look in the mirror and assume full responsibility. What gets rewarded gets repeated.

8. Hire Hard, Train Easy

This discipline is easier said than done. What is your ratio of interviews to hires? Is it 2:1, 5:1, 10:1, or 20:1? The larger the first number, the lower the turnover and the higher the productivity. Great managers understand and accept this; poor managers are lazy with this commandment. Who do you allow on the bus? Are they in the right seat on the bus? This is huge when building your team. My friend, Chuck, was a master of this. He was great at developing relationships with the right people. He was patient, persistent, and relentless in pursuing and hiring great people. He built a $25 million dollar commercial HVAC service company in twenty years from $800,000 in 1980. He trained liked crazy. Chuck told the CEO one day in front of me, when the CEO was lamenting the overall cost of training new people, “There is only one thing worse than training someone and then having them leave. That is if we don’t train them and they stay!” Hire up. Hire young Turks who want your job. Talent deprecation is hiring down. They in turn hire down, and that person is serving your customer. If you are a “six”, hire an “eight”; they will hire “tens”!

9. Become a GOOD-Finder

Are you a GOOD-Finder or a FAULT-Finder? What if you got in the
habit of praising people in public? The very best managers I have seen are great at acknowledgement and recognition. “Treat people as they are, they remain. Treat them as they can be, they become.” Catch people in the act of doing things right. This is simple, but not easy. It’s a habit. Each of us moves toward pleasure and away from pain. My publisher used to say, “You know what I like about you? EVERYTHING!” Research and the successful organizations around the globe have proven one thing: Employees who are cared about produce more, stay longer, and are easier to get along with. Care more than others think is wise. Become a GOOD-Finder. Praise pays.

10. You Have a Team Of People

In a bacon-and-egg breakfast, the chicken was INVOLVED, but the pig was COMMITTED! Do you want compliance or commitment? Get your team involved in the ideation process. Break them into groups to brainstorm and ask the right questions: “How can we generate more leads from the field?” and “What will inspire you to action (time off, cash, movie tickets)?” As the coach goes, so goes the team. Keep searching for new ideas. Master the previous nine disciplines. The answers will come. Invest in education for both you and your greatest asset, your people. Education always brings a return, not once, but many times over. Ben Franklin said, “Take a coin from your purse and put it in your head. It will come flowing from your head and overflow your purse.” Ben understood.

These are the things we must never forget and remember to do.

One last thing: have fun. Life is short. The best is yet to come. The secret to life is just one thing. That’s your job. Find out what that one thing is. Thank Curly. Giddy up!

Book of the Month

The One Thing You Need to Know: ...About Great Managing, Great Leading and Sustained Individual Success by Marcus Buckingham