

Why Attitude is Everything

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Your attitude is one of the single most defining attributes of your leadership. I've coached some very gifted leaders. Their natural talent and skill were through the roof, but their attitude got them in trouble and hurt their leadership and their church. In a couple of cases, it took them out.

An attitude is an inward feeling expressed by outward behavior. It's a frame of mind or disposition. That's why an attitude can be seen without a word being said. You notice that frown of disapproval on someone's face in a meeting, or a pout from the sulker who didn't get their way, or the glare of an unhappy cynic. A negative attitude is easy to spot.

The difference between a positive attitude and a negative attitude can make or break your ministry. I'm not remotely suggesting that a positive attitude should replace authenticity. Disingenuous hype is not the same as a positive attitude. You can be completely genuine and still possess a positive disposition because a positive nature is a choice, not a skill, gift, or personality trait.

When you're in a group, and someone insists on finding all the problems rather than solutions, or dwells on why the idea won't work, what is your response? Are you drawn to them, or do you want more distance? Of course, we need to deal with the reality of problems, but you can face them with a positive nature that is bent toward a solution or a negative disposition that becomes a wet blanket in any leadership environment.

In John Maxwell's second book, a classic written in 1984, *Your Attitude, Key to Success*, (retitled: *The Winning Attitude, Your Key to Personal Success*), is a jewel of a book and packed with great insights. Let me share a few bullets from John's book with you:

What is an attitude?

- It is the "advance man/woman" of your true self.
- Its roots are inward, but its fruit is outward.
- It's your best friend or worst enemy.
- It is more honest and more consistent than your words.
- It's often an outward look based on past experiences.
- It's never content until its expressed.
- It's the librarian of your past, the speaker of your present and the prophet of your future.

In John's book, he focuses on how to change your attitude; in this post, I want to offer some foundational truths about your attitude as a leader.

5 Principles About Your Attitude:

1) Your attitude determines your approach to life.

Are you hopeful about the future or lean toward the darker side? It's OK to be honest about your current bias. Remember, you can choose a positive attitude.

It's not IQ; some smart people are positive, and some who are negative. It's not faith; there are Christians who are positive and some who are negative. It's not how much money you have, both rich and poor have positive and negative attitudes. You get the idea. It's your attitude that determines your approach to life, and all that comes your way.

2) Your attitude is contagious.

Your attitude is not based on your personality. As one example, some introverts have a great attitude and extroverts that you want to run from. And vice-versa. Your attitude expresses your inner disposition toward life and leadership and affects how people see you.

Your attitude rubs off on others! You know the leaders, who when they walk into the room, the room brightens, and the energy goes up. And you know the leaders whose effect is the opposite. Your attitude is contagious to anyone who is near you.

3) Your attitude shapes your relationships with people.

The tone of your attitude will determine, to a large degree, your relationships with people. For example, whether you see and believe the best or focus on the flaws is a significant factor that influences your friendships.

I want people to be honest with me, but there is a difference between someone who is critical of me or offers constructive truth that helps me become a better leader. Can you guess which one I want to be around? How about you?

4) Your attitude at the beginning of a task will affect its outcome more than anything else.

When you are assigned a project or asked to do most anything, your immediate internal response has a significant influence on the speed, quality, creativity, and the level of joy you experience through the whole process.

I remembered years ago; John gave me an assignment to personally interview and place two hundred people in ministry in just a few weeks. My immediate response was genuinely one of excitement, enthusiasm, and I couldn't wait to start. I accomplished it and had a blast doing it.

Had I thought to myself, this is crazy, and no one can do this! This is too much. Where do I start? I'm certain that attitude would have negatively affected the results.

5) Your attitude draws people to you or pushes them away.

My accountant, Lisa, is amazing at what she does. Every year at tax time she makes what can be tedious, detailed, time-consuming, and not fun, an absolute breeze. She makes it easy. I can't wait to jump in and let her work her magic. It's because she has a fantastic attitude. The same is true for you and me as leaders. We either draw people toward us or push them away.

7 Certainties About a Positive Attitude:

1) A positive attitude cultivates the winning edge.

We know it's how an Olympic athlete thinks, it's their attitude that determines what is often the winning edge. It's the subtle but powerful difference-maker. The same is true for leaders. From skill to resources, all other things equal, the leader with a positive attitude will produce better results.

2) A positive attitude helps you meet life's challenges.

Obstacles and difficulties don't rob you of your inner contentment and optimism when you possess a positive attitude. Problems are very real and can be difficult, but your attitude allows you to tackle them with much higher resolve and anticipation of success.

3) A positive attitude reduces stress and increases energy and productivity.

A leader who has a positive attitude will get more done, period. When you refuse to waste time on negative thinking or worry, your leadership capacity is increased.

4) A positive attitude creates a healthy and productive perspective.

Leaders with a positive attitude are less critical, not as likely to become cynical, less judgmental of others, and quicker to forgive.

5) A positive attitude increases your confidence.

The way you see yourself, your self-image/self-esteem, and how you believe in yourself makes a huge difference in the level of your confidence as a leader.

6) A positive attitude helps you focus more on solutions than the problem.

I had a leader once say to me, literally, "Life is hard, then you die." Now that is a negative attitude and with that general disposition can you guess if he saw more solutions or problems in everyday circumstances? A positive attitude says, "Life can be difficult, but it's wonderful, and we're going to figure it out!"

7) A positive attitude makes it more enjoyable to live with yourself.

Your attitude highly influences your inner world, your thought life, and your self-talk. And a positive attitude, one that is grateful, joyful, and full of hope, makes your life so much better. And you live with yourself more than anyone else!

The intake of scripture, choice of friends, and the values you live by also contribute significantly. (With scripture of course as the priority.) But, the simple and intentional choice of a positive attitude is a game changer!