



Five Resolutions for Aspiring Leaders

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by John Coleman and Bill George | [Comments \(87\)](#)

As the New Year approaches, people will be making resolutions to eat better, exercise more, get that promotion at work, or spend more time with their families. While these are worthwhile goals, we have a more important challenge for young people: Think seriously about your development as a leader.

These are tough times. Many leaders of the baby boomer generation have failed in their responsibilities by placing their self-interest ahead of their organizations. In so doing, they have failed to serve society's best interests. As a result, more young leaders from Gen X and the Millennials are being asked to take on major leadership responsibilities. To be prepared for the challenges you will face, we propose the following resolutions this New Year's:

Find a trustworthy mentor: Mentorship is a critical component of your development as a leader. A 2004 study showed that young leaders with mentors were more likely succeed professionally and experience career satisfaction. The essence of effective mentoring is developing a trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee. Identify someone with whom you have a genuine chemistry and who is committed to your development. Although many mentees do not realize it, a sound relationship is a two-way street (<http://blogs.hbr.org/johnson/2011/10/get-the-mentoring-equation-right.html>) that benefits both parties — not just the mentee. We suggest looking for mentors whom you admire for their values and character more than their success.

Form a leadership development group: Most of us have little time to reflect on the values and characteristics we want to define us as leaders, the difficulties we're facing, or the long-term impact we hope to have. Forming a leadership development group can give you the space you need to think deeply about these subjects. Leadership development groups are groups of six to eight people who meet to share their personal challenges and discuss the most important questions in their lives. Find people you can trust, and make a commitment to be one another's confidential counselors. Meet regularly, and share openly your life stories, crucibles, passions and fears, while offering each other honest feedback.

Volunteer in a civic or service organization: Have you served your community this year? In the Facebook era it's easy to lose touch with our real-world neighbors. Long hours often cause us to avoid volunteer opportunities. Participating in local organizations — from religious organizations to civic groups — can give you early leadership experiences, provide real connection to your neighbors, and offer opportunities to serve others. It adds a dimension to your life that work can't, and helps you develop and solidify your character while giving back to the community. You will find your time serving a community organization is highly rewarding while broadening your outlook on people and life.

Work in or travel to one new country: "The world is flat," as Tom Friedman puts it, so it has never been more important to get global experience. In the future cultural sensitivity will be a more important characteristic for leaders than pure intellectual ability. John's survey of more than 500 top MBAs found that on average they had worked in four countries prior to entering graduate school (<http://hbr.org/web/slideshows/what-young-leaders-want/3-slide>) and expect to work in five more in the next ten years. Having a global mindset and the ability to collaborate effectively across cultures are essential qualities for aspiring leaders of global organizations.

Finally, ask more questions than you answer: With the high velocity of change in the world, it is impossible to have answers to all the important questions. Much more important is a deep curiosity about the world and the ability to frame the right questions in profound ways. The world's toughest problems cannot be solved by you or any one

organization. Your role will be to bring the right people together to address the challenging issues you raise. Our research demonstrates that the biggest mistakes result from decisions made by people without deep consideration of thoughtful questions.

Young leaders will soon be asked to take on major leadership responsibilities in their organizations and their communities. We believe it is essential that they take steps like these in order to be prepared for the difficult leadership challenges they will face. There's no better time to get started than the coming year.