Leadership. When we think about our own leadership, how do we measure our success? We almost always measure it by the people that we're leading. Are they engaged? Are they growing? Do they trust me? But what if the greatest indicator of your leadership success has nothing to do with the people you lead? What if your success rises or falls on your ability to lead just one person? The one person you can never hand off, you can never step away from, you can never escape. That person is you.

Here's an interesting question. If you had to follow yourself for the next year - your habits, your moods and emotions, your schedule, your excuses - would you actually want to be led by you? Most of us never ask that question, do we?

Whether you're leading a team at work, leading a serve team, or leading a household, we spend so much energy learning how to lead other people, but we rarely put any energy into the one skill that all leadership depends on: the ability to lead ourselves. You can appear to be successful at leading others and still be quietly losing to your own habits, your own mindset, your own drifting sense of direction.

So, let's talk about it. Not about leading others, about leading yourself. And let's start with the why. Why is it important to master self-leadership? Well, because before you can lead anyone else really well, you have to become someone worth following. You might have the title, the role, the responsibility of a leader, but there's a difference between being a leader on paper and being a leader worth following. And that gap is closed in the unseen, unglamorous work of leading yourself.

Another answer to why master self-leadership is this. It's the key to sustaining influence. People don't follow who they don't respect. And respect, it's like trust. It's not given; it's earned. You earn the respect of those you lead by allowing them to see the life that you've built. And what they see, well, that's the result of the hard work you've done when no one else has been watching.

Another reason that self-leadership matters, it's the key to longevity. You see, teams will change, roles will change, seasons will change, but you are with you until the very end. John Maxwell, he said it really simply. He said, "Leadership is influence." So, the real question is this: "How well do you influence you?"

You see, we face our greatest leadership challenge every morning in the mirror. The person in the mirror, that's both your greatest obstacle and your greatest opportunity to become who you were meant to be. It's not really dependent on your boss or your spouse or even your team. So, if you want to be a leader worth following, one who earns and sustains respect and leads well through every season, your first job each day is simple. Lead the person in the mirror. Lead them carefully and consistently.

So, how do we actually do this? Well, there's a few steps, and the first step is this: you've got to know yourself. Knowing yourself allows you to define your identity as a leader. If you don't see yourself as a leader, it's really hard for the people that you're leading to see you as one. And you cannot lead what you don't understand. And most of us, we operate from an outdated picture of who we actually are.

So, begin by knowing your strengths. And I define strengths as this. Strengths are the specific ways you create value that others don't. So, even if it feels so natural, it doesn't register with you as a strength, still call it what it is. Then, know your weaknesses. Not the safe, interview-friendly answers. I mean the real you. The procrastinating you. The you that defaults to what's easy instead of what's right.

And honesty, oh, it's mandatory. You can never lead yourself well if you're lying to yourself along the way. Brutal honesty, it leads to beautiful authenticity, and people long for an authentic leader. Knowing your emotions, that matters, too. See, self-awareness, it's not just noticing what you feel, but it's knowing why you feel it.

And then, don't let emotions blur the line between personality and character. Personality, that's how you show up on an easy day. But character, that's how you show up on a hard one. So, know how to lead with character when it's hard, because that's when leadership matters most.

One more thing: self-regulation, that's also important. It's not suppressing what you feel, but it's choosing your response instead of defaulting to just a reaction. Choosing your actions, that means that you stop being a passenger in your own head.

So, with your strengths defined, your emotions in check, and your leadership identity established, the next step, that's to grow yourself. To grow yourself deliberately, systematically, and consistently. You see, the gap between where you are and where you want to be, it's almost never a knowledge gap. It's a doing gap. You probably already know what you should be doing, but doing it consistently when nobody's watching, yeah, that's the hard part.

Maybe you need a new perspective on discipline. See, most people think that motivation fuels discipline, but hey, motivation, that's just a feeling, and it will come and go with your sleep and your mood. But healthy discipline, it isn't a feeling; it's a system, and it runs whether you feel like it or not. As James Clear puts it, "You don't rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems."

And every habit, it's a small vote for the person you're becoming. And your environment, oh, it shapes you so much more than willpower or motivation does. So, don't be a victim of your environment; be the architect of it. Be specific. Write your goals down, and write them in short, memorable statements, and then share them with people you trust, and ask those people to help you improve your goals or to affirm them. You cannot develop what you don't define.

And remember, your inputs; those determine your outcomes. So, if you don't like your outcomes, then go examine your inputs, especially what you consume, because you'll ultimately conform to it.

One more tip. You won't lead yourself well by yourself. Show me your friends, and I will show you your future. So, surround yourself with the right people. And not just people with common interests, but people with common values who are a little further down the road than you are. And ask those people for coaching, not just feedback. See, feedback tells you what happened, but coaching will cause someone to step back and evaluate what happened and then help you make it better. Coaching is what helps you grow.

Now, for this last step. Most leaders, they overlook the last step because next to goals and discipline, it sounds soft, but it's actually a vital step, and it's this. Enjoy your journey as a leader. Life is full of transitions, new seasons, unexpected setbacks, opportunities that turn out great or not. Every one of them carries an invitation not just to survive, but to transform through that transition, and self-leadership is a critical part of that transformation.

Leading yourself through the transitions of life, it will help you remain confident of your growing leader identity. But apathy? Hmm. Apathy is giving permission to the circumstances of your life to become your leader. And it can lead you down a road, a road of comparison, and you're the only one that can choose a different path.

The moment you measure your journey by somebody else's map, you stop leading yourself, and you start chasing a version of success down a road that you were never meant to travel. So, don't become a victim of comparison in your leadership. Enjoy trying new things and then learning from your mistakes. Mistakes are simply evidence of growth in process.

So, let me sum it up for you. Your potential to lead others, it is a direct result of how well you lead yourself. And you're the hardest person that you will ever lead. So, take these three steps. Know yourself, because you can't lead what you don't understand. Grow yourself, because knowledge without action changes nothing. And then, enjoy the journey, because life is a series of transition that are designed to help you grow.

And here's the encouragement. You already have what you need to start. You don't need a new title. You don't need anyone's permission or to wait until you feel ready, because you never fully will. You simply need to look in the mirror tomorrow and lead the person looking back at you a little better than you did today. That person in the mirror, they're counting on you. And I trust that you will lead them well, and everyone else you're called to lead, they're going to follow.