The 10-80-10 Principle

The Key to Maximizing Your Time and Effort

By John C. Maxwell.

People ask me all the time how I get so much done. First, I tell them that a lot of it is thanks to my high energy mixed with low IQ. I just don't know any better. But that's not really the key to my success at achieving a variety of goals. The secret is something I've been practicing for many years, but haven't really taught that much: The 10-80-10 Principle.

If you know me, you're already aware that I'm a big fan of delegation. I delegate almost everything. But there are right ways and wrong ways to delegate. The 10-80-10 Principle is what I consider the best way to delegate.

Here it is in a nutshell. For any project, I divide the total process (100%) into the first 10%, the middle 80%, and the last 10%. Then, I involve myself in the first and last 10%. The middle 80% is carried by my team. I pour myself into the first 10% in order to get the project started on the right track. Then I hand it off to the team. I interact a little bit with them, but not much. It's really their baby. After the team has taken the project almost to completion, I dive back in again and help with the final 10%.

I call those two parts the bookends of success. I coul also compare the process to piloting a plane. The crucial parts of the flight are the takeoff and landing. They're the most dangerous, and the most complicated. By involving myself in the team's project during those crucial times, I'm able to help them make a successful trip.

For today's post, I'll describe the five things that I make sure to provide for my team during the first 10% of any project. Then on Friday, I'll share the five things I provide during the final 10% of the project. Here's what I provide when I involve myself in the first 10%:

1. The Big Picture

I've often said that leaders see more than others see. This time at the front end of the project is when I share with the team what exactly I see, and what exactly I want the outcome to be. I don't want my team to get started and get lost. It happens all time. People get started and get lost, because they don't see the big picture. So I use this time to make sure we're all on the same page and have the same goal.

2. Objectives

Now it's time to break down the goal into specific objectives. I try to focus on only four or five main objectives. These provide the "how." How are we going to achieve the overarching goal? It's a good idea to keep these objectives simple, and make them visual. You want your team to be able to look at them later and be aware instantly of whether they're still on target.

3. Direction

Here I break things down even farther – helping figure out the specific responsibilities of each person on the team. I want to give each individual direction, because they're not all

going to be doing the same thing. Each person needs to know their position, so that there won't be conflicts later. And it's easier to know who's accountable.

4. Resources and Support

Now each person knows what they need to do to achieve the goal. It's time to find out what they need from me to make it work. What kind of resources do they need? Do they need other people to assist? Do they need workspaces? Are they in need of monetary support? Before I can expect people to give me what I'm asking for, I need to give them what they need to get the job done.

5. Responsibility

This is where I hand off the "ball" and let them start on the next 80% of the job. I've given them what they need and set them up for success. I want them to be clear on the fact that the task is theirs, and I won't be involved much until the end of the project.

At this point, after handing off the project for the team to do the next 80%, I can move on to other projects, or go back to tasks that I need to accomplish. Delegating in this way allows you to have more than one project going at once, because you're not involved for 80% of it.

Now, a lot of people delegate in this way, but the ratio is more like 10-90. The leader is involved for the first 10%, but then the team takes everything to completion. That's what I love about 10-80-10. It takes any project to another level of excellence, because the leader, the one who originated the big picture, steps back in and helps elevate the work of the team.

Apply this principle, and you'll see your efforts maximized and your impact increased.

The Impact of the Final 10%

A lot of leaders have learned to do the first part of the 10-80-10 process. But to really make this work and take your projects to a new level, the leader needs to jump back into the project near the end.

These are the things I give the team at the end of the project:

1. Experience

As the leader, I'm likely to have a lot of experience dealing with projects or situations similar to this one. Here is where I share that experience: I do it by listening to the team describe what they've done, what problems they encountered, and what solutions they came up with. And often, they'll describe a situation that I've encountered before. I've lived it. And because of how I handled it in the past, whether successfully or not, I may have insight that I can share to help the team solve the problem this time.

2. Questions

I've listened to the team describe the project, and now I'm ready to ask them questions about it. I ask questions that a consumer might ask. I raise questions that show the team where the holes are in their plan. Questions like, "What will you do if this happens?" This process gives the project integrity, because it forces the team to plug any holes in their idea and make it more solid.

3. Ideas

This is what I call putting the cherry on the top. As we've gone over the team's progress, I've helped them improve bad ideas, and I've heard a lot of good ideas. What I'm looking for now is a great idea. Sometimes I'll have one to offer, something that came to light from all of the good ideas. Other times, I'll ask the team to help me make ideas *great*, and together we'll come up with some winners that we can use. This is a fun time, as new thoughts bubble up. Maybe our ideas will actually make the big picture bigger. Where we now need a new frame for it. During the first 10% of the project, we thought a lot of things. Now, in the last 10%, after actually doing the work, we know a lot of things. There's a big difference between building on what you think, and building on what you know.

4. Voice

At this stage, I stand up and put my name behind the project. I give it my leadership credibility and authority. I've done the work necessary to be assured that the task has been done with excellence, and now I support the team's hard work by lending my name to it. This not only represents the project well to outsiders; it also supports and encourages team members, because they know I truly believe in them.

5. Leadership Intuition

The last thing I do is take this project and ask who's grown as a leader out of it. There's always someone who took responsibility for making things happen. Who owned this project? Did anyone step up and take ownership, even if they weren't officially the leader? If you're strategic as a leader, you can use delegated projects as a way to find and develop new leaders.

Delegation is a buzzword for leaders. We all know we need to do it; otherwise, we're just doers. But to delegate well, you need to set your team up for success by investing your time on the front end. And I propose that you can further empower your team by spending time with them on the back end of a project, to make the outcome the best that it can be. That's the 10-80-10 Principle.

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