VISTAGE
The CEO's
7 Laws of
Leadership

The CEO's 7 Laws of Leadership

You are in the business of making decisions, and it's the outcome of those decisions that define your success. So how do you make the right decisions to create big impact for your company?

This guide is a start. Through coaching 100,000+ CEOs for over 60 years, we have identified the fundamental truths about what it takes to be a successful CEO.

These laws will help you transition from a good decision-maker to a great one:

1. Reject shortcuts to growth.
2. Carve out space to work on the business.
3. Challenge your thinking with fresh perspectives.
4. Stoke curiosity.
5. Apply discipline to decision-making.
6. Find a trusted guide.
7. Rise by helping others.

1. Reject shortcuts to growth

Great leaders pursue leadership excellence with the commitment of a world-class athlete. They know it's a challenging, continuous journey that requires hard work and determined attention.

They reject shortcuts and take ownership of their development.

They bring rigor and grit, working hard to hone their expertise and committing their whole selves to continual improvement. They push themselves to learn more, grow further and lead better.

> *"Leaders bear a responsibility to renew their perspective to secure the relevance of their organizations."*

Leadership consultants
Kenneth Mikkelsen and Harold Jarche
Harvard Business Review

Try This | *Two questions to reveal your blind spots*

Leadership consultant and Vistage speaker AmyK Hutchens helps CEOs identify and work on their blind spots, so they can improve their problem-solving capabilities. Here are two questions from Hutchens that can help reveal your leadership blind spots:

1. What am I missing?

When leaders have an answer for everything, their attitude promotes rigid and fixed thinking. That, in turn, stifles curiosity, creativity and innovation. To overcome the classic *"I know"* attitude blind spot, simply ask: "What am I missing?"

2. Where's the truth in the feedback?

When leaders ask for constructive feedback, they then need to sit back and absorb the information without defensive posturing and without interrupting. The real reflection comes afterward, when the leaders asks themselves: "Where's the truth in the feedback?" Answering this question illuminates possible blind spots and allows leaders to move forward more effectively.

2. Carve out space to work on the business

Successful leaders routinely carve out time and space away from the business to reflect, acquire new knowledge and focus on strategy.

This discipline allows them to gain the clarity they need to navigate the day-to-day challenges while keeping their company on course for long-term success.

They fight the instinct to always be on-the-go, forcing themselves to slow down for thoughtful decisions.

"Stillness is a lost art and one that is critical to the success of a leader. To think critically about our business or our lives, stillness is imperative. It's this time away that allows us to grow."

Danielle Baldwin
Vistage Chair

Try This | *Make space for reflective thinking*

Reflective thinking is the one thing a CEO cannot outsource. To make it a priority, Gair Maxwell, an expert on disruptive innovation, offers four ways to slow down and make space for reflection.

1. Schedule one day a month for critical thinking

Turn off your phone, shut down your email and focus on thinking critically about your business.

2. Get out of the office

Many leaders think more clearly when they're outside or active. Go for a run, hike a trail, visit a museum, hit the gym, or peruse an art gallery — whatever it takes to clear your head.

3. Pick up a book

When reading don't limit yourself to business books. Reading fiction is a great way to reduce stress and inspire creativity.

4. Take a nontraditional retreat

Plan a corporate offsite that takes your team off the beaten path. Some resorts tailor corporate programs to interests such as art, adventure, sports, food and wine tasting.

3. Challenge your thinking with fresh perspectives

Great leaders seek diverse perspectives on important decisions from trusted peers. They actively work to combat insular thinking and confirmation bias.

They find other CEOs and business leaders who've tackled similar issues but in different industries. These peers understand the nuances and challenges of the role but bring fresh perspectives, unhampered by institutional knowledge.

When a group of diverse leaders gather in the same room, this effect is amplified — especially if the environment is safe for open dialogue and candid feedback.

Try This | *Root out confirmation bias*

Rather than seeking support that reinforces your beliefs, "Data Doc" Thomas Redman recommends considering the opposing view and trying to defend it. He writes in Harvard Business Review:

1. Gather the data you would need to defend this opposite view.
2. Compare it to the data used to support your original decision.
3. Reevaluate your decision in light of the bigger data set.

4. Stoke curiosity

World-class business leaders are high on curiosity and low on ego.

They are inquisitive, welcome new ideas from trusted sources, and eager to explore. Vulnerability is viewed as an asset, and they are the first to admit they don't have all the answers.

They ask questions to seek input and pressure-test their assumptions, so they can come to the best decision for the business – not to prove their own point.

> ***"What separates top CEOs from the rest is how much they question, probe, and then process what they are experiencing in order to look for insights and patterns."***

Adam Bryant
"How to think like a CEO," strategy+business

Try This | *Ask better questions*

Curiosity comes from questions. Vistage executive coach Beth Miller advises CEOs to lead by questioning. She offers five tips to improve your questioning skills:

1. Avoid leading questions to truly understand the other person's perspective.
2. Ask open-ended and diverse questions.
3. Ask questions that create clarity.
4. Ask empowering questions that lead people to positive action, rather than assigning blame.
5. Ask questions that help employees think analytically and critically.

5. Apply discipline to decision-making

High-performing leaders follow a disciplined approach to decision-making.

They use a systematic process that takes into account their instincts; judgment based on experience and data; and perspectives from peers, mentors and employees.

Applying this rigor helps them make more accurate decisions in less time … consistently.

"Develop an approach to decision-making that feels authentic to you. There's no one 'right' method. What counts is that you rigorously apply a conscious process that regularly leads to better decisions — and better results for your business."

Sam Reese
CEO, Vistage Worldwide

Try This | *Prioritize your decisions*

Prioritizing decisions is step one. President Dwight D. Eisenhower used a matrix method to determine priorities, taking into account urgency and importance.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	**Do** Do it now	**Decide** Schedule a time to do it.
Not Important	**Delegate** Who can do it for you?	**Drop** Eliminate it.

6. Find a trusted guide

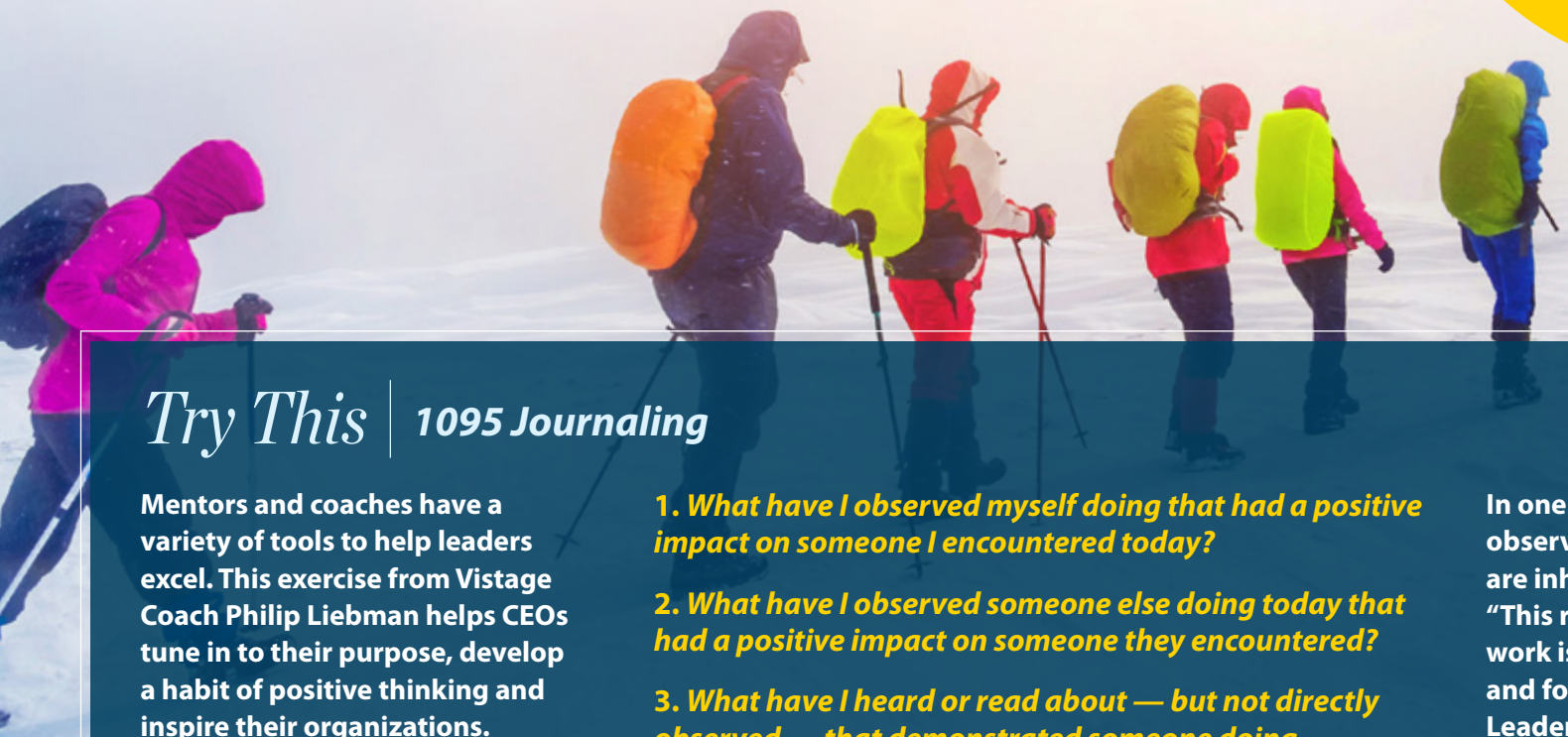
Successful leaders view a coach or mentor as a critical component to leadership excellence. They value a trusted guide who challenges their assumptions, identifies their blind spots, and holds them accountable.

The most effective coaches and mentors approach the CEO as a whole person, not just the leader in the corner office.

Leaders who take a comprehensive approach to development that includes feedback from trusted peers, effective mentoring and insights from subject-matter experts continually outperform their competitors.

Tip

There's a significant advantage in finding a mentor or coach who has a track record of success in the CEO role. They understand the challenges of this position and possess the business acumen. A mentor who knows your market offers an added bonus.



Try This | *1095 Journaling*

Mentors and coaches have a variety of tools to help leaders excel. This exercise from Vistage Coach Philip Liebman helps CEOs tune in to their purpose, develop a habit of positive thinking and inspire their organizations.

In a journal, ask and answer the following three questions:

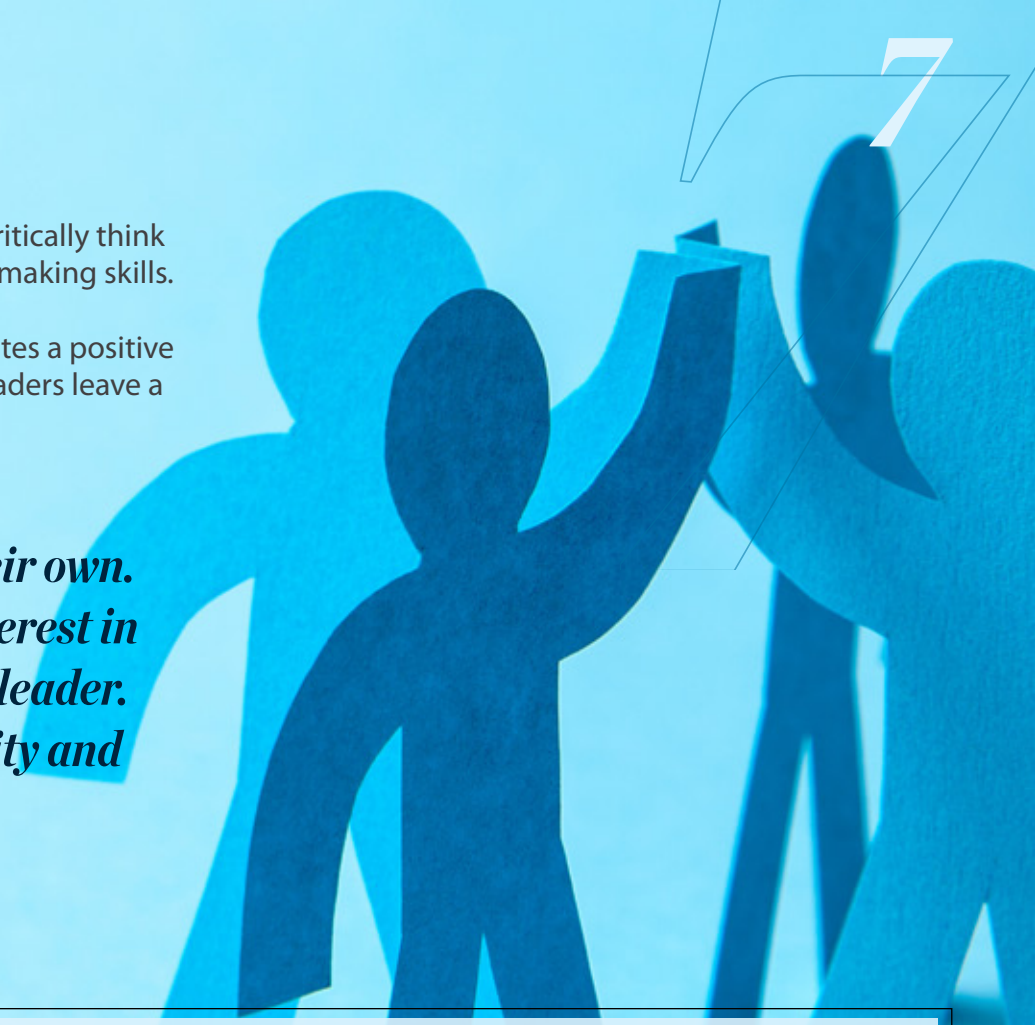
1. ***What have I observed myself doing that had a positive impact on someone I encountered today?***
2. ***What have I observed someone else doing today that had a positive impact on someone they encountered?***
3. ***What have I heard or read about — but not directly observed — that demonstrated someone doing something positive for another person?***

In one year, the CEO captures 1,095 observations about "things that are inherently good," says Liebman. "This reinforces the belief that this work is both necessary and possible, and fosters conscientiousness. Leaders who see there is something valuable and something good to work toward are more likely to perform to their potential."

7. Rise by helping others

Great leaders aren't just focused on their own decisions. They help others critically think through their challenges. In the process, they fine-tune their own decision-making skills.

By helping others make better decisions, a CEO or business owner also creates a positive impact on other companies and their communities. These high-integrity leaders leave a legacy that's far-reaching and long-lasting.



"I firmly believe that no one gets to the top on their own. CEOs get there because someone else took an interest in helping them. That is part and parcel of being a leader. When people help you, you have the responsibility and obligation to help others."

Darrell Jackson
Vistage Chair

Try This | ***Assist with a diagnosis***

One of the best ways you can help a peer is to make sure they're spending time solving the right problem, rather than a symptom of a deeper issue.

You can help them diagnose the real issue by asking questions about:

- **background information**
- **what they're trying to accomplish**
- **why it matters**
- **what solutions they've tried**
- **where they want help**

Most importantly, make no observations or suggestions. Questioning will help them clarify their thinking and get to the true challenge.

Learn like a leader

The CEO's 7 Laws of Leadership aren't based on opinion. They're based on coaching more than 100,000 CEOs and business owners over 60 years and helping them outperform the competition.

Since 1957, Vistage has used a comprehensive system to help CEOs become better leaders, make better decisions and get better results. It has three core elements:

- **Valuable perspectives from a trusted group of peers**
- **Professional guidance from an accomplished business leader**
- **Deep insights from subject matter experts**

Our unique model delivers real results: Member companies grow on average 2.2X faster than the average U.S. small or midsize business.

If you want to learn like a leader, apply these 7 laws and explore membership in a local Vistage CEO group. Leadership excellence isn't some pie-in-the-sky idea. It's achievable, and we can help you reach it.

"All the years spent in the workforce did not prepare me for the rigors of founding and leading my business. Vistage, with its world-class speakers, the experience of other CEOs, and the guidance of a business coach, provided me with the exact tools I needed to achieve the goals I set out for myself and my company."

Jean Bourgeois
Founder and President of Excelas, LLC

Vistage is the world's largest and most comprehensive approach to executive coaching for small and midsize businesses. For more than 60 years, we've been helping CEOs, business owners and key executives solve their greatest challenges through confidential peer advisory groups and one-to-one executive coaching sessions with accomplished business leaders. Today, more than 23,000 members in 20 countries rely on Vistage to help make better decisions for their companies, families and communities. The results prove it: Vistage member companies grow 2.2 times faster than average small and midsize U.S. businesses, according to a 2017 study of Dun & Bradstreet data. Learn more at **vistage.com**.

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