

Ned's Rules of Engagement

These are not rules to live by; they are rules to enjoy living by.

Introduction

I developed a particular passion during 22 years of service in uniform. That passion was how leaders work - what they did, and more importantly, why they did it. In 1998, I began to articulate some guidelines that I had learned over time, both in and out of uniform, about how people (who are responsible for the work of others) should conduct themselves as leaders. The important consideration here is; "It is not important what we do, rather it is why."

These guidelines grew into what I now call "Ned's Rules of Engagement." The quirky title comes from two separate concepts. First, people who are responsible for the work of others need to live by a code of conduct in order to ensure success in their own work - being responsible for the work of others. This is an "engagement" to live by a code of the type given below - just like any other promise made to oneself. The other connotation of the title phrase comes right out of its military meaning and can be applied in the same context. That context is a set of allowable actions leaders may take when faced with a pre-defined set of circumstances - or, "if circumstance A occurs then I am allowed to take action B." So, the second implication is that these rules help focus a leader's vision on the best set of responses they may use to react to developing circumstances.

"Ned's Rules of Engagement" are about what we do as leaders and which set of circumstances would normally trigger each one of the rules. In the end, they are not really my rules. Others really did all the work in developing them and I cannot claim credit for the wisdom they provide me. All I did was catalogue them into my own list.

Based on this approach; "what" is less important than "why", I have attempted to articulate the reason behind the most desired approach for each circumstance. The best reasons we can have for doing anything affecting our team are those most clearly understood by our team members and most acceptable to them. When we are responsible for the work of others, therefore, the best "reasons" we can have for our actions are based on a principle or a set of principles. Leaders who are remembered not only for their successes (because simple success is not enough) but also for their positive contributions to their group, are those that followed this very approach.

Today these rules are posted on my door at work. If I breach any one of them, my colleagues have the right, and are encouraged to exercise the duty, to call me on the breach. They are automatically in the right.

The rules are not so tough to follow and I really enjoy the simplicity they can provide when faced with complex circumstances that may include conflicting

requirements. They are how I measure my own performance - and sometimes how I measure the performance of others (who are responsible for the work of others). My colleagues are exempt from this examination because very few of them have had the opportunity to experience the types of situations where understanding these is critical to survival.


Some of my bosses, however, have not been so lucky - especially those who have had access to the same type of common sense training that I enjoyed. There have been occasions when I have demanded adherence to one aspect or another of these rules from those for whom I worked. In fact, one of the reasons that I really enjoyed some of my former appointments is that my boss and one particular Executive Director, could quote these to me. Which brings me to my last consideration.

These rules are not copyrighted. If I was to define the single greatest reward from having spent the time to write them (actually re-write them into one list), then that reward would be defined as knowing that more leaders and managers use them. It would make life so much easier for me in a number of different ways, not the least of which would be an ability to get more done within the common constraints of time and other resources. I have the advantage of working for someone who understands and applies them but many people work in organisations where leadership authority is exercised by those who do not or will not. Conversely, application of these rules by leaders, whether or not they have managerial authority, can remove 95% of all job-related dissatisfaction experienced by their team members.

If anyone needs to know what implementation of these rules can accomplish, here it is:

Good leaders can motivate dispirited teams of people to achieve difficult objectives under impossible circumstances.

And this is the most that any organisation can ask of its leaders - at any level.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a large, sweeping 'E' and a long horizontal stroke.

J.E.J. (Ned) Gravel, CD, PEng, CA-LS, CAE. IPL

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001. *Selection and Maintenance of the Aim* is a concept that was invented to focus one's efforts for the conduct of war. It is also the first principle of success. When you are up to your backside in alligators, it may be difficult to remember that your original aim was to drain the swamp. Remember it – find the plug – drain the swamp. Most of the alligators will follow the water.
002. Leadership is defined as the *Art of Motivating People to achieve a common goal*. Management is defined as the *Science of Planning, Coordinating, Directing and Controlling resources to achieve an organisational goal*.
003. People are not resources...they are people.
004. Believe in your people first. They will look after the rest.
005. The first goal of a true leader is to write his/herself out of the job – become dispensable. All parts of the organisation should be able to function without the leader's direct intervention. The true leader need not worry about loss of job – there are always enough new challenges to prevent this occurrence.
006. The first task of a leader is to name his/her successor. The people in the organisation need to know that there will be continuity of leadership.
007. People will only follow leaders who believe in something more important than oneself. No person willingly follows someone whose first interests are self-serving. They will tolerate such a person, but they will not follow them.
008. Leaders need to do three things well to succeed, and they need to do them in the following order:
 - Develop and articulate a vision for their team
 - Sell the vision and its associated aims to everyone on the team
 - Help the members of the team to achieve their aims.
009. Leaders will achieve success only when the success of the team is written in the eyeballs of the members of the team.
010. Organisational success can be defined as the moment that the last person in that organisation adopts their portion of the organisational vision, the main proponent of which is the organisation's leader. In this way, the organisation can continue to function as a coherent whole, without the necessity of constant leadership intervention.

011. Not making a decision is never an option. A decision to do nothing is still a decision.
012. Responsibility is the sum of the authority to do what is needed and the accountability for the results. No person can be responsible for something over which they have no authority, or for the results of which they cannot be held accountable. Authority is derived from the same entity that holds the individual accountable for the results – the organisation or person that delegates the responsibility.
013. The success of any meeting between two or more people rests solely with the person who wants the meeting. This is the person who has an idea or vision to transmit, especially if they wish other people to accept and act upon their ideas. Anyone having trouble accepting this truth should consider the person with the idea to be a vacuum cleaner salesman and then try to blame the housewife for his failure to sell her his idea – that she needs to buy his vacuum. Better still, consider the idea person to be an infantry battalion commander and then blame his soldiers for not getting the plan on how the unit is supposed to take their objective. If you try to allocate any of the responsibility for the successful outcome of these meetings to the housewife or the soldiers, consider whose responsibility it is to deliver clarity, establish understanding, and instil acceptance of the ideas being sold. Good Luck!
014. Effective communication consists of two parts listening and one part talking.
015. Companies do not make purchasing decisions. People do. People buy from others (including you) by going through the following purchasing sequence:
- First, they buy you
 - Second, they buy your idea
 - Finally, they buy your product or service.
016. Anyone trying to make a presentation, teach others, or sell an idea to others will have their credibility based on the following criteria with the annotated weighting factor:
- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| • Physical appearance and movement | (Visual) | 55% |
| • Quality and tone of voice | (Vocal) | 38% |
| • Content of the idea presented | (Content) | 7% |

017. A sale is defined as the happy exchange of product or service for dollars. Marketing is defined as doing something today to ensure sales tomorrow. The process of marketing is the eliciting of a specific, desired behaviour from a specific target market.
018. The Communications function is a subset of Marketing. Marketing is about convincing the people in a target market to do something. Communications is about how to get the message to them that best motivates this desired behaviour.
019. A Business Plan is the articulation of business rules to live by and how to live by them. The same is true of Strategic Plans, Quality Management Systems, Marketing Plans, Corporate Plans, and so on. These plans tell organisations (us) about which things we are going to do. The hard part is defining what those things are.
020. All personal endeavour requires the use of four available resources. These are Energy, Knowledge, Time and Money. All of these are renewable resources, except Time.
021. In my professional life, they are colleagues. In my personal life, they are the most precious creatures in the universe. (This one may get me into trouble.)

Ned Gravel is a retired Canadian soldier, sailor, pilot, author, and international accreditation body peer evaluator. He still enjoys reaching and training people.