

Living the 21 Laws of Leadership

The Law of Timing

When to Lead is as Important as What to Do and Where
to Go

*“When leadership is right and the time is right, the people can
always be counted upon to follow—to the end at all costs.”*

—Harold J. Seymour

Application Guide

We have all heard the phrase "He/she was in the right place at the right time." There is another that goes like this, "It's not who you know; it is when you show up!" These phrases may be tongue-in-cheek, but there is more truth in them than you realize! Timing is a significant part of success or failure of anyone's life. Think of the impact of timing when it comes to the Florida Marlins. The baseball players that joined or were on the team during the 1997 season, tasted a sweet victory — they won the World Series! Those on the team in 1998 are in dead last, what a difference one season makes. *The Law of Timing!*

When it comes to a leader's life, the *Law of Timing* becomes even more important. People made jokes about the "peanut farmer from Georgia," but the *Law of Timing* helped Jimmy Carter become the 38th president of the United States on January 20, 1977.

Think back on the national conditions prior to the election, they were ripe for a change, one that Carter could step into. People were worn out from the war in Vietnam and the disgrace of Watergate. They were discouraged and demoralized, and they were especially skeptical of people who had any connection with Washington government. While campaigning for office, Jimmy Carter, who had never served in Washington, said about himself, "I have been accused of being an outsider. I plead guilty. Unfortunately, the great majority of American Citizens . . . are also outsiders." It was perfect timing for an "outsider" to move into the White House.

Carter graduated from Annapolis, and intended to spend his career in the U. S. Navy, but when his father unexpectedly died in 1953, he returned to Plains, Georgia to take over the family business. In only a few years, he became a strong, respected businessman and a leader in the community.

In 1962, times were changing, and Carter decided to run for the Georgia Senate. He was an outsider to the old political machine in Georgia, but he was determined and was elected. Then in 1970, he ran for governor and was elected. Once again, he recognized that the timing was right for a relative newcomer to challenge the established political machine.

What Carter did next was almost unthinkable. He decided to run for President of the United States. Here was a man whose entire career as an elected politician consisted of one term in the Georgia Senate and one term as the state's governor. His experience was minimal, and he had no presence on the national scene.

When Carter first threw his hat into the ring for the presidency, people in the media ignored him. They figured that a little-known ex-governor from the South with no Washington experience had no chance to obtain the Democratic nomination, much less the presidency. Carter never gave up. He and a few key associates had recognized that the timing would be right for him in 1976, and they met to talk about it.

The *Law of Timing* confirmed that it was the right time for an outsider to run, and Carter was everything the recent Presidents had not been: He held no public office while campaigning, having

finished his term as governor in 1974. He was not a lawyer by profession and he was a vocal proponent of his Christian faith. Carter, unlike the previous presidents, had not been part of Washington politics as a Congressman, Senator, Vice-President, or Cabinet member.

I believe that at no other time in history could Carter have been elected to the presidency. The *Law of Timing* works both ways. In 1980 it cost Carter a reelection. The country faced as many problems as it ever had. The economy was a mess with double-digit inflation, record-high oil prices, and skyrocketing mortgage rates. There were also numerous foreign policy problems, including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and of course, the long captivity of the American hostages in Iran. Reagan pounded Carter with his 489 electoral votes to Carter's 49.

I. Assessment

The following questions will give you insight as to how well you are living the *Law of Timing*.

- A. Do you make it a practice to seek wise counsel, from a hand selected small group, before you make major decisions and take major action?
- B. Do you think through issues of personal timing such as preparation, ability, and motivation?
- C. Do you generally trust your intuition when it comes to issues of timing?
- D. Do you thoroughly study the market conditions before making a major move?
- E. Do you have personal confidence in your sense of timing, or do you tend to hesitate?
- F. Do you have the experience and maturity needed in your current field to make wise decisions that affect major changes?
- G. What is your personal track record when it comes to timing?
 - The wrong actions at the wrong time = Disaster
 - The wrong actions at the right time = Mistake
 - The right actions at the wrong time = Resistance
 - The right actions at the right time = Success

II. Application

The *Law of Timing* can sound like one of the more mechanical, or "black and white" leadership laws. Perhaps because of the word "time" within the word timing. Do not let that fool you, it is one

of the most subjective and intuitive of all the leadership laws. I will do my best to offer you some practical and "mechanical" steps to help you apply this law to your life.

A. Think through your personal "internal" conditions before taking action.

1. Check your personal _____ level.

Leaders often must take action even when they do not "feel" like it, but taking a quick inventory of your motivation level before taking action is still important. Are you more encouraged or discouraged? This affects your decisions and how you lead others around you.

Leaders do not have the option or luxury of being discouraged for long periods of time. So, if you find yourself in a "blue funk" get around those people who are "lifters" in your life, or perhaps do something you personally enjoy, or take a weekend getaway to clear your mind and regain perspective.

2. Check your personal _____.

Are you capable of leading the people through the process at hand? What skills are required? How does that match with your personal talents and experience?

3. Check your personal _____.

You have studied the *Law of Sacrifice*, which gives you much insight to your own commitment level. It is obviously not wise to take any major action without being 100% committed to it. *Every "percent" of commitment you lack, is a "percent" of possibility that you will not succeed in your endeavor.*

4. Check your personal _____.

Have you completed your "due diligence?" Are you ready for the project at hand? NASA is a great example of readiness and preparation. They take the astronauts through high-tech, rigorous and comprehensive training before they ever set foot in a Space Shuttle. They understand that once the rocket ignites . . . it is too late to begin preparing!

It is true that a significant amount of a leader's preparation comes from on the job experience, but that does not prevent you from doing everything you can to intentionally prepare for each major action or decision you make.

5. Check your personal _____.

The *Law of Intuition* will give you great help and insight on this point, take some time to review that leadership law. In this chapter I want to add three additional areas:

a. Understanding

What is your level of understanding in the area that you are considering an issue of timing?

Low

Medium

High

b. Maturity

What is your personal maturity level in the area you are considering an issue of timing?

Low

Medium

High

c. Experience

What is your experience level in the area you are considering an issue of timing?

Low

Medium

High

Two of the three marked "high" is needed for "sound" action.

B. Think through the "external" conditions before taking action.

1. Market conditions

What is your "competition" doing. Learn from their actions, both successes and failures. There is a building used by a number of restaurants in the San Diego area. Every restaurant went out of business - about 4 or 5 in a row. The interesting thing is that right next door is Carlos Murphy's, a restaurant that existed before the others tried and still does today. It has maintained a great business the whole time. I would not want to be the next restaurant in line without knowing what "Carlos" is doing right and the others did wrong!

What is the receptivity of the people to your product? We have seen strange things such as the success of "pet rocks" and "cabbage patch dolls", but these fads are not the norm. The norm is well thought through and researched patterns of consumer purchasing.

What is the receptivity of the people to your service? For example, if you were to try to grow an evangelical church in Salt Lake City Utah, you may find less than the receptivity you desire. This does not mean you are not to go forward, but you must think through the issues.

What is the need? Perhaps you are evaluating where to plant a new church. If there are many healthy and growing churches in a relatively small area, the need may be small and cause you to look elsewhere.

What are the economic conditions? Remember the late 70's with the high inflation, expensive gas prices, and lack of stability in the national economy in general? This was not a good time for manufacturing large automobiles — at least that was the thinking of the major U.S. auto-makers.

Location is an issue. Real Estate people will confirm this truth. It may be the right thing, at the right time, but in the wrong place. Euro-Disney is a good example of this. Disneyland, one of the most successful ventures ever, both in Los Angeles and Orlando, just never caught on in Europe.

2. Other _____

What other opportunities are available to you. Consider all your options!

3. _____ within your organization

Are your key people in alignment, (not necessarily every person in agreement,) with the heart of your mission or project? By alignment over agreement I mean any small differences have been overcome and a plan is in place that everyone can "buy-into." Do your key personnel have the capabilities to accomplish what you have in mind, and what is the condition of their overall morale?

4. _____ within your organization

One of the cardinal rules of business is never be under-capitalized. Is your organization financially ready to undertake the action you are considering? This was one of the largest single factors that impacted and continues to impact Skyline Church's ability to relocate. A large portion of the success of their dream is attached to financial strength.

5. _____

What can you learn from others who have gone before you in your field of endeavor. Do not short-cut this step, learn all you can! It makes no sense to repeat mistakes that have already been made by another organization.

III. Action Assignment

Create your own "timing team" to advise you in the key actions you take. This group is small, loyal, trusted by you, and wise in their judgement of the issues. Usually, this group is not young, but there are certainly exceptions. They may or may not be employed by you or even in your company. Meet only on an as need basis.