

7 Quotes That Changed My Life

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Over the last decade, many people have asked me how to be a better leader. There are a million ways to answer that question; be humble, ask questions, listen twice and speak once, etc. etc. etc.

Many of the answers are cliché, but sometimes a cliché is accurate. Any success that I have had, whether in my past career at Amazon or in the indoor climbing industry thereafter, is the culmination of the successes of my teams (above/below/beside) and the sum of all the wisdom imparted to me by others.

Without overcomplicating it, here are seven phrases or themes that have helped define “good” for me.

Ask Don't Tell

What it Means:

As a leader, you might have the authority to tell people what to do, but just because you can, does not mean that you should. When directing your team, it takes minimal effort to ask them to do something, instead of ordering them to do something, but the difference in tone is huge.

How it Looks:

- Don't Say: “I'm going to need those TPS Reports ASAP.”
- Instead Say: “Peter, can you complete those TPS Reports by end of the week?”

Meet at Gemba

What it Means:

Gemba is a Japanese term meaning “the actual place.” To meet at Gemba, often referred to as Gemba Walk, means that leaders meet in the actual place where work is accomplished. Meeting individuals in their workspace can accomplish many things such as letting you see their work situation, making you accessible to the rest of the staff, and generally being able to reach out and touch the subject matter. It can also remove upper management from the “ivory tower” perception and reality.

How it Looks:

When meeting with your team, ensure that you avoid exclusively meeting in an office, a corporate location, or an off-site coffee shop. When reasonable, meet your General Manager in the middle of the gym and your Retail Manager in the retail space.

Dress the Part

What It Means:

As a leader, sometimes it is not about dressing for the job you want, it is more important to dress for the role your team needs you in. If you show up to the gym in a suit and tie, your approachability and the team’s willingness to ask you for help will be different than if you wear the company uniform or a t-shirt and jeans. No task is below a good leader, so ensure you are dressing in a manner that says you can do the job.

How it Looks:

While reopening our gyms during COVID-19, staffing was challenging. As the Chief Operating Officer, I asked the upper management team to be available to cover shifts. When a gap came that matched my availability, I stepped in to open one of the gyms and work as a front desk employee reporting to a Shift Manager. The surprise and joy I saw from both staff and members when I showed up in uniform and proceeded to mop floors was icing on the cake for doing the right thing.

Slow is Smooth, Smooth Is Fast

What it Means:

Working at Amazon, there was a strong military presence in both management and company culture. I cannot recall who first shared this U.S. Navy Seal motto with me, but it stuck. **In almost**

every situation, it is more effective to slow down to make the right decision, rather than rushing and creating rework. A complimentary phrase I also like: ASAP/ASAR. As soon as possible, as slow as reasonable.

How it Looks:

Communication about change is the area where I most often see this motto ignored. When making changes, there are tiers of individuals who should be involved before, during, and after changes. It takes noteworthy time to solicit feedback at multiple levels, weigh options with the leadership team, and then communicate to each layer, in order, from top to bottom. However, if you intelligently choose who you talk to along the way (think squeaky wheels), then you can achieve stronger buy in faster than if you simply made a top-down decision.

REQUIRED READING: [The Leadership Development Series](#)

Procrastination Charges Interest

What it Means:

If 'Slow is Smooth' told us that we need to take our time, this is the equal but opposite ideology. In many instances, items such as HR issues or facility maintenance are best tackled as soon as they are recognized as a problem. The longer they sit, the more they spread like cancer and ultimately lead to additional work or problems later.

How it Looks:

My favorite thing about running indoor climbing gyms in Texas was maintaining HVAC during 100+ degree summers. If my sarcasm did not convey, rest assured, it is thick. A preventative maintenance contract and a strong relationship with a reliable HVAC provider can be the difference between a proactive \$500 deep cleaning and a reactive \$5,000+ replacement of your entire HVAC system.

Steal Shameless, Give Credit Graciously

What it Means:

A problem I have seen in many small businesses is an unhealthy fixation on who will come up with the next big idea and a corresponding hesitation to utilize someone else's idea, even when it is clearly superior. The climbing industry is extremely willing to share tips and tricks and is so interconnected that you are always a degree or two of Kevin Bacon from the answer. Although a

new idea might seem more “fun”, the fastest way to accomplish a task has normally already been perfected, likely by someone else.

How it Looks:

A leader whom I followed for most of my Amazon career once told me that my promotion to Senior Manager was one of the least “sexy” he had seen. What he meant by this is that there was no “ah-ha” moment or key breakthrough. By the numbers my performance was consistently well above average, and my area of expertise was defined by my ability to gather all the best practices from around the country and implement them for our warehouse. While some of my peers were swinging for the fences, I was worried about getting on base.

Never Be the Highest-Ranking Officer with a Secret

What it Means:

When you are the highest authority with knowledge of a situation or decision, you give it your seal of approval, either directly or through your lack of objection. Conversely, when you inform your supervisor, they now hold that responsibility.

How it Looks:

As a ~24-year-old front-line manager one of my employees informed me that I broke a PPE-related Amazon policy without realizing it. The employee and I were on good terms, and he informed me as a favor to help me correct my behaviors in the future, as he had been written up for it previously. Although I could have done nothing, as he never mentioned it again, I escalated the situation to my supervisor. He did the same, imparting the quote above and eventually, my behavior was noted on my record, per protocol. Had I not escalated, or had my supervisor kept it to himself and it came to light later, we could have both been in hot water.

Fast forward ~3 months and I was under consideration for promotion. When this situation was highlighted, my willingness to self-report and acknowledge my mistake outweighed the instance itself and I was promoted shortly after.

Operations have become a core part of my life. It defined my college years, and my first decade in the workforce and bleeds into most aspects of how I live my personal life as well. These quotes are a glimpse of how I arrived at my current place along the path and hopefully, they can help guide the paths of an operator near you.

Find All The Best Resources For Leaders, including ideas to "Steal Shameless, Give Credit Graciously"

About the Author



Paul Terbrueggen, aka Tall Paul, is an operations leader with 10+ years of experience. He offers small business consulting for gyms looking to streamline operations, increase retail revenue or otherwise grow their business. Previously he worked at [Summit Climbing, Yoga & Fitness](#) as the Retail Director and then Chief Operating Officer for their eight locations in Texas and Oklahoma. Prior to Summit, he led teams of up to 4,500 for Amazon Fulfillment Operations

An avid boulderer, he can often be heard claiming to be "more tall than talented" at 6'6". Paul enjoys all manner of activities, indoor or outdoor, especially when shared with his fiancée Becky and two puppies Penny Lane and Lil McGill (but everyone knows her as Nancy). In addition to consulting and writing for the CWA, Paul is an analyst for End 2 End Outdoor, representing La Sportiva, Petzl, and Big Agnes.

☐ A COMMON MISCONCEPTION OF COACHING

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THE INDOOR CLIMBING INDUSTRY NEEDS CERTIFICATION ☐

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