

WHAT ARE YOU COMMITTED TO? By Dr. John C. Maxwell

What do you think of when you hear the word commitment?

Perhaps you picture a loving husband caring for his invalid wife. Maybe you envision a business owner who puts her resources and reputation on the line to lead her company through a crisis. Perhaps you see a dedicated teacher who spends hours of his own time tutoring underprivileged children. Or maybe the scene that comes to mind is one of a group of soldiers who willingly enters harm's way to protect their countrymen.

These are all wonderful examples of commitment. But have you considered the fact that individuals who act in less admirable ways also are committed? People who watch the clock at work are committed to making it through the day so they can go home. People who spend most of their free time in front of the television are committed to taking life easy. People who cheat on their income taxes are committed to beating the system.

Do you understand what I'm saying? When it comes to living a life of significance, the vital question isn't, "Am I committed?" It's, "What am I committed to?"

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to observe many remarkable individuals who I refer to as "make-a-difference people"—the kind of folks you want on your team and in your life because they're constantly making positive things happen. As I wrote in the last issue of *Leadership Wired*, "make-a-difference" people stand out from everyone else because they are connected—to a great leader, to a powerful vision and to other people who want to make a difference.

Another critical factor that sets "make-a-difference people" apart is their deep level of commitment in four key areas:

1. Make-a-difference people are committed to excellence.

Conforming to someone else's standard of excellence isn't an option; they set their own bar, and they set it high. If you want to be a difference-maker, your bar of excellence should be higher than anyone else's. In other words, you should expect more out of yourself than anyone else expects out of you.

2. Make-a-difference people are committed to service.

George Burns once said, "When you stop giving and offering something to the rest of the world, it's time to turn out the lights." That is so true. Anyone can call himself a servant-leader, but that description is meaningless unless it's accompanied by action. True servant hood manifests itself in the following four ways:

- **It puts others ahead of an individual agenda.** True servants aren't in it for themselves; they're committed to the growth and well-being of the people they're serving.
- **It begins with security.** Service often takes us out of our comfort zone, and in order to function effectively in such unfamiliar territory, confidence is a necessity.
- **It initiates service to others.** It doesn't wait to be served. It doesn't wait to be asked to serve. It goes first.
- **It is not position-conscious.** You show me a person who serves, and I'll show you someone who cares little about titles.

3. Make-a-difference people are committed to growth.

I have found that there are three types of people on earth: the unlearned, the learned and the learning. If you want to make a positive contribution with your life, never stop stretching and growing. Make a concerted effort to learn today what will help you do better tomorrow. If you grow in the right areas today, you'll reap the right rewards tomorrow.

4. Make-a-difference people are committed to giving.

The reason for this is simple: Giving is the highest level of living. Here are four ways to develop a giving spirit in your life:

- **Be grateful for whatever you have.** It's hard to be generous when you always want more for yourself.
- **Put people first.** The measure of a leader is not the number of people who serve him, but the number of people whom he serves.
- **Don't allow the desire for possessions to control you.** This is so critical. Do you control your money, or does your money control you?
- **Develop the habit of giving.** Author Richard Foster made a profound statement about this: "Just the very act of letting go of money or some other treasure does something within us," he said. "It destroys the demon greed."

Now that I've described the characteristics that set make-a-difference people apart, it's time to get personal. Do you want to make a difference in your business, your community, your family or any other area of life that is important you? If your answer is yes, I have one more question for you. Are you making a difference—wherever you are, whatever you're doing?

I certainly hope so. But if not, don't get discouraged. Instead, as I said last time, get busy. There's no time like the present to become a make-a-difference person.