



About 25 years later, I was a senior leader in an organization. I was new to the job, and I was excited about this new role, and I'd studied leadership for years. And I brought every single leadership book I had and put it on a bookshelf in my office. I was really proud of it. I literally had a library on leadership, and people loved borrowing my books, but I only lasted about a month in that job. The boss I went to work for got fired a week or so after I arrived, a new boss came in, and she fired me very fast, wanted her own team. I was devastated, and I'd never been fired before. I remember I had tears streaming down my face, as I packed up all those books on leadership for a long, slow, painful drive home.

The irony did not escape me even in the moment. Here I am. I've got this amazing book on leadership, bookshelf on leadership, and I didn't stay very long as a leader. And I just got inside of me that leadership was either in me or it wasn't. If it was in me, then I didn't need the books. And if I wanted to refer to the books, I could always go and purchase them. I took every single one of them to a charity shop that afternoon and gave them all away, my entire library on leadership.

The problem with leadership is that most of our role models are either superheroes who don't exist in real life, or they're larger than life characters who saved the day in extremely challenging circumstances. And leadership's messy, no matter how many leadership books you read. What I discovered after 40 years of messing around with leadership is that there are three counter-intuitive rules to being a great leader.

Number one, the reverse golden rule. We all know the golden rule, treat others as you want to be treated. The reverse golden rule says treat yourself how you treat others. Great leaders are often selfless. You know that feeling, how you do everything for your team, for your company, for your community, you'd work all day until you're exhausted and you collapse, and then you get up the next morning and you work some more. Sound familiar? It feeds you for a while, but if you're not careful, you'll eventually collapse completely. So make time to take care of you first. Just because something's a cliché, doesn't mean it's not true. Take time to put on your oxygen mask first.

Great leaders are great coaches by design, if not also training, which means your job is to be your own best client. I'm extraordinarily good at helping leaders take care of themselves. I'm just not so good at doing it for myself, which is why I forced myself to take a month off every summer and a month off every winter. If I can't take care of myself, how can I take care of you?

Number two, the diamond rule. Diamond and graphite are both forms of the element carbon, yet diamond is the hardest mineral on the planet, and graphite is used to make pencil lead. It's incredibly soft. Polished diamonds are so beautiful and so strong. Graphite is so soft, it can make a mess on a piece of paper. The diamond rule states you can never get too big, and you can never get too messy.

Never get too big. Well, bragging is a lost art. And rather than feeling envious, top performers tend to feel inspired by other people's accomplishments. Healthy top

performers use admiration and even jealousy as a fuel. Wanting what someone else has can inspire you to action.

I was recently discussing this idea with an African-American leader who has a PhD. She told me one of the reasons it's hard for her to truly share her accomplishments. For black people in America, sharing their achievements often resulted literally in their death. Humility was lifesaving. It's a feeling that goes really deep and it goes back generations. And it humbled me to realize the depth of this impact on her. Great coaches create a safe place for you to brag. And it's worth remembering, it's not bragging if you've done it.

You can never get too messy. Well, when you're a top performer, it's often not safe or appropriate for you to share your struggles with your board of directors, your investors, your senior team, your customers, or your clients. Sometimes there are things you don't even want to share with your husband or wife. And one of the dark sides of being a top performer is a need to prove yourself. But as high-level leaders, we crave an opportunity to speak our truth and to share what's really going on. On a regular basis, I help my clients share the messiness by finishing this sentence stem: what I don't want you to know about me is...

Great coaches create a safe place for clients to get messy. Success is on the other side of failure, mistakes, and screwing up. Freedom is on the other side of owning your failures, your mistakes, and your screw ups.

Ever hired a coach, and found yourself trying to prove yourself to them, for days or weeks? One of the things you can do as a coach is take that off the agenda for your clients, help them to have a safe enough place, they can get messy. And you may be surprised at the number of extremely successful people I've worked with who are so grateful to have this place where they can feel messy in a way that they cannot out in the world.

Number three is the snowflake rule. For a very long time, people thought snowflakes were so visually or unique from one another that no two were ever the same, but recently, scientists have discovered that when you grow snowflakes under the same precise laboratory conditions, you can create two almost identical snowflakes. What makes snowflakes different in the real world is that each snowflake takes a different turbulent path through the atmosphere on its journey to earth. So each twist and turn and fall gives it a unique symmetry. That's your job as a leader, to be unique. And what makes you unique is your own turbulent path through life, every twist and turn and fall grants you your unique symmetry. So don't hold them back from the world.

Over 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle cited three modes of persuasion, pathos, ethos, and logos. Pathos appeals to emotion by citing tragedy or sadness. Ethos appeals to authority or credibility by citing your distinguishing character and guiding principle. And logos focuses on facts and reason, as opposed to emotional appeals. In recent years, the word snowflake has become a derogatory term that implies a person

has an inflated sense of uniqueness, or that they aren't able to deal with opposing opinions.

Ignore that. Be a special snowflake, share your struggles, share your successes, share your principles, and share your ideas. All of that together, the emotion, the credibility, the facts and reason, are very enrolling for people who listen to you.

For many, many years at my intensives, I had a theme tune in Sammy Davis, Jr.'s song, I Got to be Me. I'm not going to attempt to sing it to you, but I will say some of the words. Whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong, whether I find a place in this world or never belong, I got to be me. I've got to be me. I'll go it alone, that's how it must be. I can't be right for somebody else, if I'm not right for me, I got to be free. I've got to be free. Daring to try, to do it or die. I've got to be me.

In his own words, Sammy Davis, Jr. was the only black Puerto Rican one-eyed Jewish entertainer in the world. He started on Broadway, was a movie star, had his own TV variety show. He reached the top of the Billboard Hot 100 and became a star in Las Vegas. He received an award from the NAACP, won a Golden Globe and an Emmy. He received the Kennedy Center Honor for a lifetime of contribution to American culture. And posthumously, he was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement award. Sammy Davis, Jr. modeled the power of being yourself. If you want to be a great leader, be you.

One of those rules is probably the most important one for you right now. Which one is it? Is it the reverse golden rule, where you need to treat yourself how others would treat you? Is it the diamond rule, where you need to play in a way where you can't get too big, you're willing to brag about what you've accomplished, and you can't get too messy, you've got a safe place to really mess up? Or is it the snowflake rule, where you're going to look back at those unique twists and turbulent turns in your life and embrace them and know that those can be the very reasons your dream clients want to learn from you. Be you. Be you. Be you.

For most of human history, it wasn't called coaching. It was called a leadership. And it's what I love to do, to coach people, to lead people, and to mess with people's thinking. If you'd like more of this, or if you'd like to learn more about our community of extraordinary top performers, go to [richlitvin.com/1insight](http://richlitvin.com/1insight).