

The National Association of Realtors , “The Voice for Real Estate,” is America’s largest trade association, representing more than 1.3 million members involved in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries.

Remarks by Dick Gaylord  
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## **Leadership Lessons**

### **Introduction**

Good morning. I am so pleased to be with all of you today. As a Past NAR President I have learned quickly that the invitations and the first-class treatment and attention stop very quickly; so, when Jim invited me to speak here today, I jumped at the chance.

I want to take just a minute to recognize your outstanding CAR Leadership – President Jim Liptak; President-Elect Steve Goddard; Treasurer Beth Pearce; and Executive Vice President Joel Singer.

I believe this is the strongest leadership team in the history of the California Association of REALTORS®. We are all very fortunate to have them to guide us in 2009.

What an honor it is for me to speak to such an energetic group of leaders. Now, more than ever, we need strong and positive voices to help our members through these challenging time.

Leadership is not a one-way street! In my experience, leaders often benefit from their involvement at all levels of the association.

In fact, I can tell you that being President of NAR was one of the most challenging roles I have taken on in my career. Yet, it was also the most rewarding. And, I learned quite a few lessons about leadership along the way.

Today, I want to share some of the things I have learned during the past several years, in the hope that they will help you become better leaders in the years ahead...

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**Rule #1 – Learn to Deal with Change**

**As President John F. Kennedy said, “*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.*”**

**Back when the MLS first became available on the computer, I continued to carry my MLS book around with me: I was reluctant to embrace change. Even though listings became instantly available, I carried my book anyway.**

**Within days, I learned that making the jump to a different way of doing things is often a better way. Going to the MLS on line instead of carrying the book around - I only wish I would have made the change sooner.**

**When I joined the NAR Leadership Team, I was reluctant to start using a Blackberry that was given to me as a gift. I was concerned that there would be difficulty receiving emails from two different email addresses.**

**Again, I was resistant to change. But change won me over once more, and by embracing change, I became more efficient as both a Realtor and a leader in NAR. And, for those of you who know me, you know that my Blackberry is an integral part of my life – in fact some would say it has been surgically attached to my hip.**

**I will share a secret with you – whenever I travel, my clients don’t even know that I’m out of town.**

**The first step in assuming a leadership role is to realize that everything is always changing in the real estate business We go through cycles – sometimes business is booming; other times it’s slow.**

**If we are to be successful, we have to accept the changes that are occurring today, and face them head on.**

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**At the same time, we have to keep our eyes on the horizon so that we aren’t surprised by the next set of changes that will affect our businesses and our organizations.**

**Both of these goals – accepting change and keeping our eyes on the horizon - require us to think about old problems in new ways – and consider challenges that we have never thought about before.**

**As leaders, we also have to be prepared to change our course of action when the situation warrants it. But, most importantly, we have to keep a positive attitude! We have to train ourselves to see opportunities where others see obstacles.**

**Think about how much our business has changed in the past decade – from technology to lending practices to consumer preferences. All of these changes have created challenges for our members - and for you and me.**

**Yet, thanks to outstanding leadership at CAR and NAR, the Realtor family has an outstanding track record of turning challenges into opportunities.**

**We created the Center for Realtor Technology, we have led the industry in helping to educate consumers regarding their loan options, and we continue to develop new educational opportunities to ensure that our members have the experience that today’s consumers require.**

**I think we all can agree that real estate is undergoing more fundamental changes right now. How we, as leaders, handle these changes will determine what the future holds for real estate, for all Realtors and for each of us.**

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**Lesson #2: Managing is NOT Leading**

**Leadership Guru Warren Bennis once said, “Managers do things right; leaders do the right thing.”**

I know from experience that taking the step from manager to leader is often difficult. Think of it like parenting – when children are young, you manage them. You oversee their every move and tell them what to do and what not to do.

When your children are grown, you can’t manage their everyday activities any more. Instead, you have to lead them by helping them make their own “right” decisions, and supporting them whether they succeed or fail.

Just like with parenting, failure to give up some control as professional leaders has its consequences.

We often confuse leadership with what it is NOT. I believe that true leadership cannot be awarded, appointed or assigned. In other words, leadership is NOT the same as management.

Managing is tactical – making sure a strategy that has been mapped out is achieved, step by step.

Leadership, on the other hand, is about vision. Leaders set the strategy and keep tabs on its growth and development.

True leaders provide their teams with a clear vision, a clear direction, and the passion and conviction they need to see it through.

Leadership is about positively influencing people, about encouraging innovation and creativity. It is motivational and inspirational.

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**We can create a perfect team if we celebrate what people do well and complement them with people who have different talents. Embrace members’ diversity!**

**Leadership certainly has its risks, but I think you will find that the benefits of empowering your colleagues is well worth it.**

**Lesson #3: Above All Else – Listen!**

**When I began in this business, I had just left the University where I had been teaching real estate courses.**

**I thought I was a hotshot – only to realize I didn’t put one deal together my entire first year in the business. I was too busy talking instead of listening.**

**I may have been communicating clearly, but I didn’t have a clue what my clients wanted.**

**When I began listening 95 percent of the time and talking only 5 percent of the time, I began doing lots of business.**

**No matter how busy my day is – I know that listening has to be a key part of everything.**

**It’s also important to listen to new voices – not just the same familiar perspectives that have driven the organization or your company for many years.**

**When you seek out junior voices, two things generally become apparent: how much those newer members have to say and how important it is. At the same time, so many of them feel as though they’re not being taken seriously.**

**I’ve learned that same lesson multiple times during my career. I think of it as listening to what I call “the voice of David.”**

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**In the Bible, nobody listened to David. There were plenty of gizmos with which to fight the giant Goliath, but David was dismissed as just a little kid with a slingshot. In the end, however, that “punk kid” was right.**

**There is a tradition in Benedictine monasteries that follows this same practice. When a decision has to be made, the abbot (the head of the monastery) asks each monk’s opinion. He always starts with the youngest. And, the order is intentional.**

**When I’ve made a good decision, it’s usually because I’ve listened to the voice of David. And when I’ve made a poor decision, I haven’t taken the time to listen.**

**In a position of leadership, taking the time to listen to different perspectives is even more difficult. We are all busy, and the information that makes its way to our desks has often been filtered and is often overwhelming.**

**You have to make a conscious effort to go out and talk with people, and get a feel for who each one of them is - as a person.**

**Getting out there to talk to people is easier than you might think.**

**For example, Patrick T. Harker, Dean of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania spends more than half his time outside of his office.**

**In an interview in Fast Company a few years ago, Professor Harker shared his secret about how listening to what others think makes a difference in his ability to lead. He confessed to hanging out in the campus café and going to the Thursday night pub gatherings.**

**Dean Harker believes in a leadership model that values hearing what others are saying, candidly and unfiltered. I believe in this same payoff.**

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Look for opportunities to take some time to get out there and listen to what people think. Have coffee with a member or sit in a café for lunch and just listen. You’ll be surprised how productive this time can be.

I’ve learned that success is a two way street. As a leader, listening comes first, before a vision.

Keep in contact with and spend time listening to the members you serve and the folks you work with. That may mean slowing down a bit – but it will be well worth it.

#### **Lesson #4: It’s Not What You Say – But How You Say It**

*A construction worker approached the reception desk in a doctor’s office. The receptionist asked him why he was there.*

*“I have shingles,” he said.*

She took down his name and address, and asked him to have a seat. Ten minutes later a nurse came out and asked him what he had.

*“Shingles,” he replied.*

She asked him a few more questions and told him to wait in an examination room. Fifteen minutes later, another nurse came in and asked why he was there.

*“I have shingles,” he replied again.*

She asked him to wait for the doctor.

Almost a half hour later, the doctor came in and asked him what he had.

The man said, *“Shingles.”*

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The doctor said, “*Where?*”

He responded, “*Outside in my truck. Where do you want them?*”

The moral of the story here is – make sure people understand what you’re trying to say; ask questions; consider other perspectives; and get their input. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what they mean.

Communication is not just what you say – it’s how you say it. If you want to connect with people, keep it simple.

Being a good communicator WILL help you build solid relationships as a leader.

#### *Lesson # 5: Focus on Relationships*

I learned early on in my career that the Association Executive is the number one person who knows the most in the Realtor organization. Association Executives see members on a daily basis. Without them, I could not have had successful Presidencies on the local, state and national levels.

As President of the California Association of Realtors, we deliberated over how to get more members involved in committees without more work for the staff. The elected leaders met and devised a plan to allow two vice chairs for every committee – something that had not been done before.

We didn’t realize that implementing our plan would require the “know-how” of our Association Executive or the idea wouldn’t take off. Joel Singer was the final piece to put the finishing touches on the idea, and ultimately, make it work for our members.

I learned that Association Executives play a tremendous role in the success of every association. They are the glue that holds us together.

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I’ve learned that building relationships with members is also one way we can handle any challenges that come our way.

Now, I don’t mean to say that we have to go out to dinner with everyone we are working with. But, we do have to work together if we are going to successfully serve our associations, and all of our members.

Perhaps the most important relationships you can build are with other leaders – this means your elected officers, committee chairs, directors and associates.

Find out what’s happening in the Realtor organization, and how you can help other leaders in addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities. Part of being a good leader, is being a good follower.

Work closely with your Association Executives. Get to know them, and be willing to both teach and be taught.

### **Lesson #6: Inspire Others**

Leadership guru Dr. John Maxwell has said *“If you want to make a difference in OTHER people’s lives as a leader, look into YOUR heart to see if you’re really committed.”*

I’ve read about a sure-fire way to test your commitment – it’s called the Edison Method. When inventor Thomas Edison had a good idea for an invention, he would call a press conference to announce it. Then he’d go into his lab and invent it.

If your commitment wavers in the beginning, make your plans known like Edison did to more than yourself. Then, you’ll be more committed to following through.

Once you have grown your skills as a leader, your commitment will inspire others. Great leadership is about demonstrating a commitment in your work: and, that commitment has to start in your heart.

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**Be aware that you can be committed to something without being passionate and vice versa. However, you need both - passion and commitment - to be successful. As leaders, we have a responsibility to encourage others to become leaders and contribute to the organization.**

**A few years ago when Richard Mendenhall, 2001 NAR President, addressed the association executives in Canada, his topic: “*Where Have All the Leaders Gone?*”**

**Richard pointed out that the ongoing need to recruit new leaders, and that the association executive can play a significant role in this recruitment.**

**He went on to say that every member will not give the same amount of time. Some may help us on a one- or-two-meeting project; others may participate on a Work Group or on a Presidential Advisory Group; and that’s ok, also. The important things is to get as many members as possible involved.**

**Show members that you are involved and that you care deeply about the organization and each of them. And, if they need a little encouragement, tell them about the benefits you have experienced by being a leader.**

**Tell them how much your clients like the fact that their Realtor has been selected by his or her peers as a leader.**

**Tell them that, as an association leader, you are the first one to know what’s going on. Mention that they can share this information with their clients before their competitors do.**

**People will remember how they personally and professionally benefited from your leadership. And, this is the legacy you will want to leave with them.**

**It’s up to you to help others understand the benefits of being a part of this organization.**

**CAR and NAR are valuable to each of us in different ways.**

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No matter what your level of involvement, keep in mind that leadership is about keeping our eyes on the goal and positively influencing others to get there with us.

### **Lesson #7: Character Counts**

When it comes to being a leader, we are defined not only by what we do, but by who we are.

When people respect who you are, they will follow you when you succeed, and when you fail – this is a true test of a leader.

Lots of things contribute to a person’s character. I don’t have time to talk about many of them today. But I do want to emphasize two very important things.

First, don’t be afraid to help others.

There is a saying that “No good deed goes unpunished!”

Well, I don’t believe it! I’ve never done a thing to help another where I didn’t help myself and where I was not rewarded.

*[Story about meeting the lady in the church – how you helped her and what happened to your listings.]*

Second, no matter how much you succeed, stay humble.

Past success isn’t necessarily an indicator of future success. Even the most experience and successful people have to face new and surprising challenges every single day.

People respect leaders who are willing to admit what they don’t know and are able to ask for help.

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My mother taught me a great lesson in humility. On the day that President Kennedy was shot, she called me. At the time I was in college and President of the Student Body. I was feeling very important and overly proud.

My mother expressed her sadness that the President was killed, and then she reminded me of how quickly Vice President Johnson was sworn in as our new President. She was concerned that her son was feeling a little too important, and she reminded me that I, too, could be replaced by one of the many other qualified students at the college.

When I became local association President, my mom asked that I not forget that when I began in the organization I sat in the back of the room, and that before long my presidency would be over and I’d be back sitting in the back of the room.

I’ve learned to keep my own sense of self in perspective because leadership at any level is never permanent.

Over the years in dealing with my clients and association members – with REALTORS – I have learned one very important thing: **OUR CLIENTS AND OUR MEMBERS DON’T CARE HOW MUCH WE KNOW; THEY WANT TO KNOW HOW MUCH WE CARE!**

Tommy Lasorda once said: **“The difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a person’s determination.”**

Because you are here today, you have shown that you are determined and dedicated.

Leadership is about many things; mostly small gestures that can translate into powerful actions and make a difference in other people’s lives.

- It’s about providing a vision that empowers others to make decisions and get things done.
- It’s about clearly communicating a vision.
- It’s about listening to new perspectives and ideas – especially from newer members.
- It’s about turning ideas into tools for change.

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- It’s about building relationships.
- It’s about setting examples in what we do AND who we are.

Great leadership is as much about character and integrity as it is about what we do:

- As leaders, we have to keep promises to members and colleagues.
- We must do what we say we’ll do.
- We have to tell the truth, even when it’s painful – and stand up for what’s right, even when our ideas are unpopular.
- We have to give credit where credit is due and when it is due.

Finally, I believe we have to be ready to seize opportunities that already exist and create some of our own. One of the best ways we can create opportunities for yourselves and our members is by getting involved at the national level.

Now is the perfect time to begin thinking about that. Every year, the Committee recommendation process begins in the spring. Now, is the time to think about getting more involved – and get your friends to think about an involvement – not only in CAR but also in NAR. We need every single person to participate! And, each member can benefit greatly from their involvement.

I encourage you all to read the information that is posted on the [car.org](http://car.org) and [realtor.org](http://realtor.org). It’s a great way to learn about committees and opportunities and to be kept abreast of what’s happening in our Industry. And, pass this information along to your colleagues, also.

Our future success depends on you.

### **Conclusion**

I wish each of you success in your careers and in your positions at CAR . I hope that someday you can pass along your own “lessons learned” to another generation of future Realtor leaders.

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I’d like to conclude by sharing two quotations with you that have great personal meaning to me. One is a description of a True Leader; the other is the Ten Commandments of Leadership:

### **A TRUE LEADER...**

Has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions and the compassion to listen to the needs of others.

He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the quality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.

In the end, leaders are like eagles...they don't flock, you find them one at a time."

### **Ten Commandments of Leadership**

1. People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered (including me). Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful. You win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the littlest people with the littlest ideas. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them. Help them anyway.
10. Give the world the best you have and you will get kicked in the teeth. Give the best you have anyway.

Thank you. I believe we have a few minutes for any questions you might have.