The 101 Rule for Leaders

Many leaders spend most of their energy on what is wrong with people. The 101 rule turns this habit around. It comes from the leadership author John Maxwell, who calls it the 101 Percent Principle in his book Winning with People. The idea is simple: find the 1 percent that is good, or that we agree on, and give it 100 percent of our attention. One percent plus one hundred percent gives the rule its name, and it can change how a whole team works together.

1. Find the 1 Percent

Every person has something worth admiring, even when it is hard to see at first. The first step of the rule is to look for it on purpose. It may be a skill, an attitude, a good habit or one useful idea in a long discussion. Leaders who search for strengths usually find them, while leaders who search for faults find faults instead. The 1 percent is not the whole person, but it is a real starting point.

Example: a football coach notices that a shy young player always passes the ball well, and decides to start from there.

At work: Nadia, a new team leader, finds Tarek difficult because he complains a lot. When she looks closer, she sees that his complaints often point to real problems in the process.

2. Give It 100 Percent

Finding the good point is only half of the rule. The second half is to give it our full attention and encouragement. This means naming it clearly, thanking the person and giving them chances to use it more. Specific praise works better than general praise, because the person knows exactly what to repeat. When people feel seen for their best side, they often grow into it.

Example: a parent who praises a child's careful handwriting soon sees more care in the child's homework.

At work: Nadia thanks Tarek in a team meeting for spotting a weak step in the ordering process. Then she asks him to lead a small group to fix it.

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3. Build on Common Ground

Maxwell also applies the rule to disagreements. Instead of fighting over the many points where two people differ, we start with the small part where they agree. This area of agreement creates trust and a calmer tone. From there, the harder topics become easier to discuss. Leaders who do this turn arguments into shared problem solving.

Example: two neighbours who disagree about parking both want a safe street for their children, so they start there.

At work: Tarek and the sales team argue about delivery dates. Nadia reminds them that both sides want happy customers, and the meeting moves from blame to solutions.

4. Keep It Honest

The 101 rule does not mean ignoring problems or giving false praise. People quickly notice praise that is not sincere, and it damages trust. Leaders still need to give honest feedback about what must improve. The difference is where the conversation begins: with a real strength, not with a list of faults. A good start makes people more open to hearing the difficult part.

Example: a teacher first shows a student what is strong in an essay, and then explains how to fix the weak ending.

At work: in Tarek's yearly review, Nadia begins with his sharp eye for problems. Then she explains that his emails need a more positive tone, and he listens.

Conclusion

In summary, the 101 rule asks leaders to find the 1 percent and give it 100 percent. Look for strengths on purpose, encourage them clearly, and start difficult talks from common ground. Stay honest, because real praise and real feedback work together. Try it this week with one person you find difficult. Small good points, fully supported, often grow into big results.

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