

# Dr. Seuss on Leadership: 10 Lessons Plus 2

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Born in Springfield, Massachusetts on March 2, 1904, Theodor Seuss Geisel published his first children's book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, under the name of Dr. Seuss in 1937. Over the course of his long career, Geisel published over 60 children's books.

Geisel once said, “*Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple.*” So in no particular order, here are a few of my favorite Dr. Seuss books (yes really) with simple answers, words of wisdom, and advice that can help you become a better manager and leader.

## **I Can Read With My Eyes Shut (1978)**

*There are so many things you can learn about, but You'll miss the best things if you keep your eyes shut.*

**Lesson 1:** Effective leaders don't lock themselves away in their office. If you manage your team all day from your office via emails and instant messages, then it will not be long before you lose touch with your staff and productivity plummets. Make it a point to get off your computer and out of your office on a regular basis. If you want to motivate your team, they need to see you “on the floor”. Talk to them, ask them how things are going, and pitch in if needed. Done correctly, they will look forward to your visits and see them as recognition and sincere interest.

## There's a Wocket in My Pocket! (1974)

*But the YEPS on the STEPS... They're great fun to have around. And so are many, many other friends that I have found.*

**Lesson 2:** Teams are only as good as their members. You've probably heard this a million times, but it's true; successful leaders surround themselves with good people who often know more than they do. This not only ensures that a team of followers has a wide variety of abilities to tackle challenges, but that the leader is also challenged to keep learning.

## How The Grinch Stole Christmas (1956)

*"All I need is a reindeer..." The Grinch looked around. But, since reindeer are scarce, there was none to be found. Did that stop the old Grinch? No! The Grinch simply said, "If I can't find a reindeer, I'll make one instead!" So he called his dog, Max. Then he took some red thread, And he tied a big horn on the top of his head.*

**Lesson 3:** Improvisation is often associated with music or comedy, but it is also important in leadership. Confronted with complex challenges, a good leader uses adaptability skills to surmount obstacles. Effective leaders find opportunity in even the most negative situations and use their improvisational skills to create innovative solutions.

## The Lorax (1971)

*Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.*

**Lesson 4:** As a leader, your team relies on you to guide them and encourage productivity. Always make yourself available to team members and always produce project deliverables on time. Lead your team by example and they will respond accordingly.

## Oh, the Places You'll Go! (1990)

*I'm sorry to say so but, sadly it's true that bang-ups and hang-ups can happen to you.*

**Lesson 5:** Setbacks will happen. Effective leaders nurture the situation to bring out the best in the team. They create a positive environment through praising good work and offering constructive feedback on how to improve when failure or setbacks happen.

## Horton Hears a Who! (1954)

*Don't give up! I believe in you all. A person's a person, no matter how small! And you very small persons will not have to die if you make yourselves heard! So come on, now, and TRY!*

**Lesson 6:** All teams need a strong leader to motivate them through a project, regardless of its size. It is your job as a leader to find the best ways to properly motivate your team to reach greatness. Sitting back and focusing only on your personal goals will not benefit your team. Make it a point to recognize team members publicly for going above and beyond the scope of their responsibilities. Your positive reinforcement motivates the entire team's work ethic.

## The Sneetches and Other Stories (1961)

*I'm quite happy to say. That the Sneetches got really quite smart on that day. The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches. And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.*

**Lesson 7:** If you want to get the best and most from people, you need to see them as equals. Leaders should never consider their position one of privilege. A good leader treats everyone on the team as an equal, listens actively, learns from others, and aligns the team around shared goals.

## Cat in the Hat (1957)

*I can hold up the cup and the milk and the cake! I can hold up these books and the fish on a rake! I can hold the toy ship and a little toy man! Look, with my tail, I can hold a red fan! I can fan with the fan as I hop on the ball! But that is not all.*

**Lesson 8:** A good leader is able to keep everyone on track towards the end goal. I often refer to it as "cat herding". Multitasking is part of it, but probably even more important is the ability to prioritize and delegate appropriately. Knowing which issues or tasks are the most important and need to get done first is key. An effective leader is able to combine multitasking and prioritizing expertly.

## Oh, the Places You'll Go! (1990)

*Will you succeed? Yes, you will indeed! Ninety-eight and three-quarters percent guaranteed.*

**Lesson 9:** Enthusiasm is contagious and effective leader knows how to use that enthusiasm to motivate other members of their team. Enthusiastic leaders are committed to their goals and express this commitment through optimism. Individuals tend to follow people with a “can do” attitude; not those who continually give reasons why something can’t be done. Leaders with enthusiasm also demonstrate to the rest of the team that the leader is part of the team working towards a common goal and not just “the boss” delegating work.

## Horton Hatches the Egg (1940)

*I meant what I said, and I said what I meant.*

**Lesson 10:** Part of being a great leader is the ability to gain the trust of your team. Leaders who are true to themselves are seen as authentic and inspire loyalty. An authentic leader is genuine and real, as opposed to fake or phony. You can’t fake leadership. If you fake leadership, your team will quickly see through it and will be unwilling to follow you and eventually resent you. Engaging authentically with the members of your team and others around you is the mark of true leadership.

## I had Trouble in Getting to Sullawally (1965)

*Then, just when I thought I could stand it no more, by chance I discovered a tiny trap door! I popped my head out. The great sky was sky-blue and I knew, from the flowers, I'd finally come through to the banks of the beautiful River Wah-Hoo!*

**Lesson 11:** There is always light at the end of the tunnel. A well-managed plan where everyone knows what tasks are expected of them, will keep you and your team focused on the end goal.

## Wacky Wednesday (1974)

*It all began with that shoe on the wall. A shoe on the wall? Shouldn't be there at all!*

**Lesson 12:** Growing up, my daughter’s all-time favorite bedtime story was Wacky Wednesday. She loved it so much, some nights she had me read it two or three times. The lesson from Wacky Wednesday is simple; always expect the unexpected.