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## LEADERSHIP POV / John Baldoni

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### Reflection on Words a Leader Uses

*Words have the power to inform... to teach us what we need to know.*

*Words have the power to wound... to cut us to the core.*

*Words have within them the power to heal... to bring comfort to those in pain.*

*Words have the power to mobilize... to call to action the forces of good.*

*Words have the power to bring us together as one.*

Words are a collection of syllables shaped into phrases and sentences. Taken individually, words are simple, plain even. Collected together, they form language, powerful and robust.

Yet whether spoken, heard or read, words fall short unless they influence how we think, feel and ultimately act.

Words can scold. They can cajole. They can bring joy. They can alleviate sorrow. And they can unite.

For leaders, words are instruments of influence. They must use words that create a language that affirms their authority over us as well as designates their responsibility for us. In return, we as followers ask our leaders to use their power wisely.

Responsibility is both a curse and a blessing. Leaders cannot choose whether to act, only when to act.

Leaders must speak about what they want to do, speak out for what they believe, and speak up for those who cannot speak.

Responsibility demands that leaders underscore their words with good example. That is, they use language to affirm dignity, truth and compassion. How leaders

use their words sets the right standard for others. Words have influence as well as a consequence.

Words a leader uses should be used to uplift not denigrate; challenge not demean, and enlighten not confuse. Words become the leader's tools to teach as well as encourage and cheer as well as console.

Words are cheapened when there is no action to support them. When you speak words, people want to hear but never act upon the meaning of those words, words lose importance. Worse hollow words breed a kind of cynicism that erodes trust and ultimately faith in the leader.

Words that are spoken in anger cause harm. Words spoken in haste may mislead. Yet words wrought deliberately, and crafted with respect, can inspire us.

Words shape the language of the stories that we hold dear. This language reminds us of our place as well as our purpose. Leaders use stories to challenge perceptions, honor sacrifice and affirm our humanity.

Stories can rouse a complacent people to awareness... and an already-inspired people to greatness. Good stories are comprised of words that resonate with meaning and language that heartens the spirit.

Words, in short, form the language we use to communicate who we are, how we do things, and why we are here. Few things are as powerful and as wise.

John Baldoni is an internationally recognized leadership educator, executive coach and the author of many books, including *MOXIE*, *Lead With Purpose*, *Lead Your Boss*, and *The Leader's Pocket Guide*. In 2017 Trust Across America named John to its 2017 list of Trust experts. Also in 2017 Global Gurus listed John as a top 30 leadership expert. His leadership resource website is [www.johnbaldoni.com](http://www.johnbaldoni.com)