# How to Become an Elite Leader

Nils Vinje has shaped the leadership style of many with his organizational leadership training. Here he offers his best tips for leading well.

**Nils Vinje**

**James:** James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 988. Today, we're talking about leadership with a leadership coach, Nils Vinje. Welcome back.

**Nils:** Thank you so much, James, wonderful to be back joining with you.

**James:** I say welcome back, because our listeners know you, you've been on this show many times, primarily as a case study, to let us all know your journey online, how that's going since you first came into my world. We've been meeting regularly every single week in our weekly mentor call. You've been succeeding, which I'm very excited about, I imagine you're excited about.

**Nils:** Extremely, yes.

**James:** When we last did a case study, you were sort of plotting a path to a million dollars a year. And today, we're not talking about the case study so much. I will just ask you, though, in general, is progress good? Are you still ticking along nicely in the background there?

**Nils:** Absolutely. Progress is fantastic, ended 2022 in a great place, started 2023 in a better place, and just keeps getting better every month and every quarter. So I really appreciate all the guidance and help, and love our weekly calls. You know I'm going to show up, and you know I'm going to ask you a question first, that's my spot. So I've got to stick to it.

**James:** He's got pole position there. He's like the Formula One cars that keep getting on pole. We'll get you back. I'll invite you back to talk about how that's going, because I know you've got a number of things that you're working on right now. And when they come to fruition, I think we'll have some exciting news to share. And, more importantly, some actionable steps people following along in the footsteps can follow.

Of course, if you want to join the call with Nils and I, each week, I do offer that in the Mentor level of my own program, JamesSchramko.com/join.

**Filling the leadership gap**

And we're going to talk about leadership today. This is really important. I think it's an important topic because I actually almost took it for granted when I came into the online space, all the leadership work that I'd done as a general manager. And then coming online, I realized a lot of these businesses are micro businesses to the point where it's often just one person, or one person taking on their first little team.

And usually, they've had very limited exposure to leadership or management beyond having a couple of bad bosses at some point, right? Like even the most famous online people now, guys like Russell Brunson, he was starting his online business while he was at a university dorm. So he didn't even get into the workforce before he started selling, I think it was potato guns online.

So I recognized there was this gap. When I did an Ask method survey, like a Ryan Levesque technique, discovered this huge need around leadership, building team. So obviously, I talk about it a lot. When I find a fellow leadership aficionado, like yourself, and you come into our group, and you've got a whole product around teaching people leadership. Let us know the name of the program and where we can find it, Nils.

**Nils:** Yeah, so the name is the B2B Leaders Academy, letter B, number two, letter B, leadersacademy.com, is where you can find it. And it's membership focused on empowering leaders with the tools to confidently handle any situation. And ultimately, what we're doing, James, is we're taking people from average to elite. And that is the kind of the cornerstone and backbone of some of what we'll talk about today.

**James:** Cool. What I'd like to do is really just dig into your toolkit, find out what are the key things we would like to know. You know I'm a fan of the 80:20, or beyond that, 64:4.

**Nils:** Let's do the 64:4 here.

## Are you being surprised too often?

**James:** Yeah, it's like, let's just paint a picture here. Let's say I have a small agency or a little information business. I've got two or three virtual assistants, and maybe a couple of contractors that I'm dealing with. That's my setup. I'm making several hundred thousand dollars a year.

But I already recognized that maybe I haven't had too much training in leadership, and that I'm getting indicators that there's a gap there between what I could be, if I was an amazing leader, versus what I am. What sort of indicators would I see? What things would I notice around me that would show me that maybe I'm not the best leader yet?

**Nils:** Well, I think surprises is one of the biggest things that come. And surprises are often accompanied with a phrase like, I assumed that such and such was going to happen, or I assumed that so and so is going to do something. And assumptions are just an incredible killer in all things leadership. Relationships have been destroyed in minutes because assumptions were made.

And every single person, you, me, everybody listening to this has 100 percent guaranteed been either the victim of assumptions or made assumptions in the past that have come back to bite them.

And so if you find yourself in situations where things are surprising, and the outcome isn't exactly what you had anticipated, what you wanted, whether it was for a project, an ad, a piece of copy, an email, whatever it is, right, and you make the assumption that somebody was going to do something, it's actually has nothing to do with them. It's not their fault. It's probably your fault. And we'll talk about why that is.

But that's one of the most important things to look out for, is when things go awry, and don't turn out as you expected, what are you really looking to is the indicator for what went wrong.

**James:** Okay, so good. So if you're constantly being surprised, and not in an excited birthday party way…

**Nils:** No. This isn't excited, this is surprised in a problem way.

**James:** Yeah, look, you're describing some of the people that I've had the pleasure to work with, where they're in constant state of chaos or mess, where no matter what they do, it's just like, staff leave them, or they don't turn in the work they thought, or they disappear, or they had major disagreements about what they thought they were supposed to be doing, or there's a mismatch in pay, all this sort of stuff.

There's lots of surprises, always surprises. I always think of their adrenal gland, their poor little adrenal gland getting squeezed and squeezed, and worn out. This is why people get burnt out. This is why people get overloaded, because it's just too much pressure.

And this is a good reason why only a certain percentage of the population are even suited to being an entrepreneur, because I think it comes back to being very responsible. And I think what you're hinting at here, Nils, is if you're getting constantly surprised, you may be not taking enough responsibility for the communication.

## Guess what - it could be you

**Nils:** That's right, that's the number one scapegoat is it's somebody else's fault. And this applies whether you're running a team of two or a team of 200, the same principle applies. I've seen it manifest in all different ways at all different size organizations at all different levels within the organization, right?

And we have a human natural desire to place blame on something so that we can give ourselves a little wiggle room and kind of, you know, skirt around, it wasn't my fault that it went down. But in reality, if we look at most of the things that are surprises in the problem category, there is a significant chance that it was the result of something that you did not do as effectively as you could have done. And especially in the leadership side, that happens all the time.

**James:** So this episode might make someone feel a little uncomfortable, because we're essentially holding up a mirror and saying, Hey, you know all those surprises, guess what? It could be you. Right? So thank you for sharing that indicator.

**Nils:** Let me share one of my favorite things about leadership, is the source of and solution to all of your problems is leadership. Right? And it gets to that point that it is at the crux of everything, which is why I love doing what I do, having been a leadership coach for over 10 years, working primarily for the first eight or nine years of that just in a one-on-one capacity with senior leaders and executives.

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

"When you have great leadership, and you demonstrate it, and you exhibit it, **you positively impact other people's lives.**"

NILS VINJE

And then transforming and building the B2B Leaders Academy with your help to bring my skills and these tools and all this incredible insight to help make the world a better place through great leadership. Because when you have great leadership, and you demonstrate it, and you exhibit it, you positively impact other people's lives. When it's the reverse, and you don't pay attention to it, and you don't care, you negatively impact people's lives. And you've told many stories of your former bosses on this podcast. I've got endless amounts of those stories we don't need to get into.

**James:** Oh no, we definitely should. [laughs] I literally had a nightmare last night about one of my former bosses.

**Nils:** You do, still? [laughs]

**James:** You know, I last left that employment from that boss at about 2004.

**Nils:** That's a long time.

**James:** That's almost 20 years ago. That's how impactful a negative boss can be in your life, right? They can really get in hard if they're reckless. You know, my favorite quote around this is a sort of a twisted version of one that most people know.

**Being responsible is power**

Most people know the Spider-Man quote, With great power comes great responsibility. While I was thinking about it, if it's true that the more responsible you want to be for your success, then with great responsibility comes great power. And if you're responsible enough to lead a team properly, it enables you to have a lot of power, like literally manpower or creative power, like this concept of buying time.

And I talk about buying time in my book, Work Less, Make More. There's even been books about that topic from people who sat in a presentation I delivered six or seven years ago, on the subject of buying time. And imagine that you don't now just get your eight hours for the day, if you had a team of 10, you've got an 80-hour machine there that you can do great things with. If you make great products, or you do solve problems, then the more responsible you can be, the more you can help other people, and also, the less surprises you get.

**Nils:** Yeah, 100 percent. And, you know, the reason I got into all leadership things in the first place, like 10, 15 years ago, was because I suffered through so many years of terrible bosses. And I couldn't believe it. When I went to grad school, and the first night in grad school, I learned one concept about leadership that made my entire previous professional experience just make sense as to why I never got promoted and why I didn't get what I wanted. And it was eye-opening.

But what I realized in getting an MBA, Management Organizational Behavior was that most of the world, especially the professional world, knows nothing about leadership. And I mean that in the just sincerest way of taking a structured path to develop leadership skills, not just getting into the role and "figuring it out as you go", which is the predominant strategy that the vast majority of leaders who are in a leadership position, whether you run a company, a team, department, whatever, that's the predominant strategy that exists. And that's why we have so many challenges with people not engaging in their work.

**James:** It's happened to me almost every time, I was definitely just thrown into leadership. Well, one of the first leadership roles I took was, I was qualified for it by the fact that I was the first person to turn up to work and the most responsible person to be able to hold a key to open the door. So I actually became the leader.
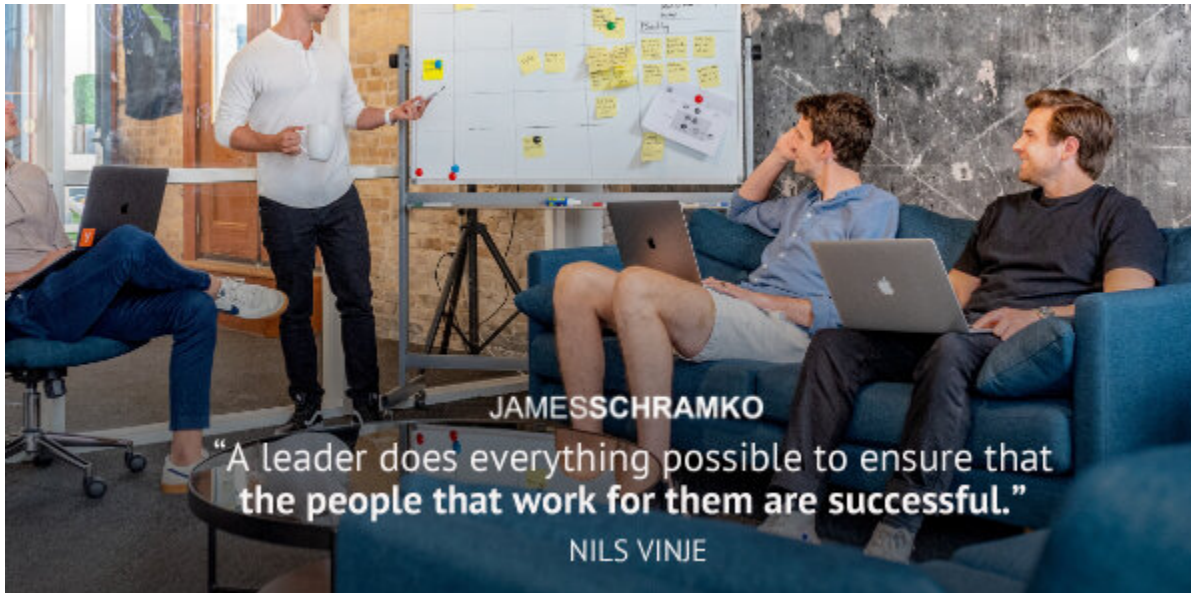
And then the next time I became a leader, my boss had actually fallen down some stairs and broken his leg and was off for about six weeks. And I was the person that could sell the most. So they figured, well, might as well give him a shot. And then finally, in that role, the organization sent me off to leadership school, they sent me to a dealer principle development program, which was significant.

It was like a live-in event in a different state, with the best trainers coming in. That's where I learned a lot of the principles that I carried through into my business world, and then on to my own business, and what I teach my own students.

And I mean, you get exposed to my leadership style every week, so you can see evidence of some of that training coming through after decades of action. But most people aren't sent off to a live-in camp, and it was over two stages too. We did stage one, and then we had homework and came back and present.

## Leadership defined by a leadership coach

So in the absence of that, firstly, how would you define leadership? What does it actually mean to you?

JAMESSCHRAMKO
"A leader does everything possible to ensure that the people that work for them are successful."
NILS VINJE

**Nils:** In my view, the simplest definition is a leader does everything possible to ensure that the people that work for them are successful.

**James:** I like that.

**Nils:** That's it. Full stop. Very simple.

**James:** And where does the word manager fit into this equation?

**Nils:** You know, it's kind of an outdated term. I think it is, it was used at a point in time. And regardless of if you are technically responsible for other people, as in a people leadership position, the title doesn't matter so much, right? And that's why, philosophically, I view everybody has the potential to become an elite leader, even if you're an individual contributor. But the vast majority of people I'm talking about are those who are responsible for others.
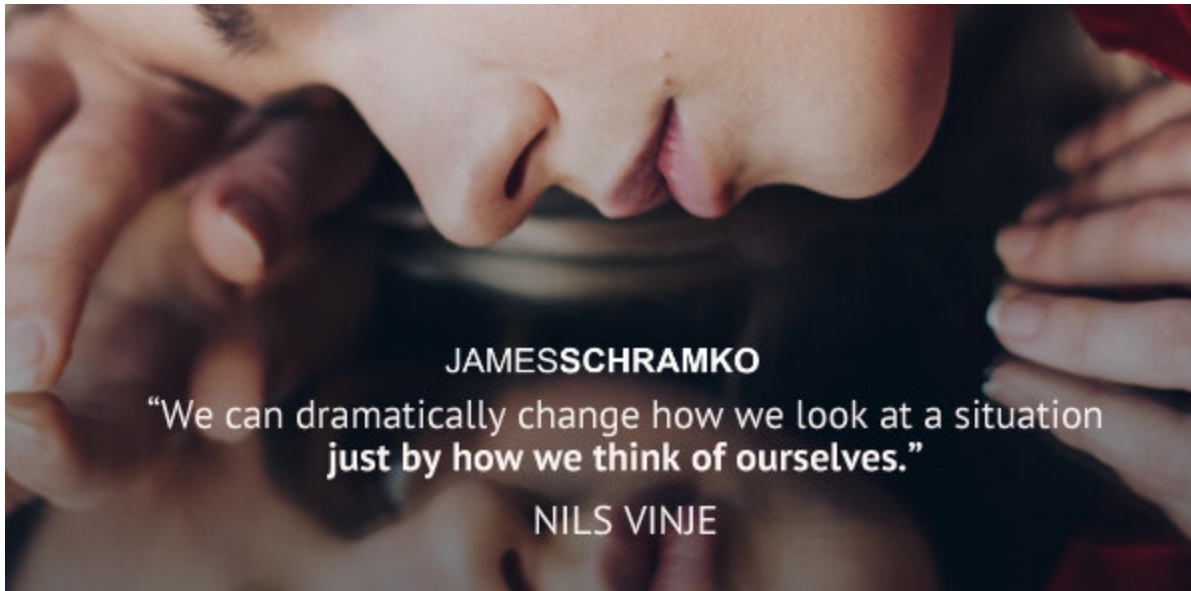
So manager is just a term that was developed some long time ago and sticks around today. I prefer the term leader. I prefer the term elite leader, because it sets it apart. And psychology plays a huge role in leadership. And we might as well start with some incredible psychology of believing that we are leaders, not just some manager here to make sure some resources do some stuff, right? We can dramatically change how we look at a situation just by how we think of ourselves.

**James:** I guess some people manage things, right? If they're a project manager, they may be, you know, manager is the modifier of the word project. They're managing a thing, not a person.

**Nils:** Correct. That's a good distinction.

**James:** Maybe if you're a human resources manager, now you're managing people. But leadership is the way you help the people under you, right? So it's distinctly different.

There's lots of cutesy little comparisons between the difference between manager and leader, but I think leader is the right term to focus on. And I think it's also applicable in life. Like you're a parent, I'm a parent, we would hope that we're leading our children, that seeing them be successful, when you're a coach or you're mentoring people, you're responsible for their success. That fits with what you're saying, it fits with what Jay Abraham would talk about that you have a fiduciary duty to be their custodian, and for them to be successful.

**Nils:** Exactly. And I feel that every week on our calls, you know, when I ask my questions when we talk, and then how you interact with every other person on that call, right? I know that you have all of our best interests in mind, whether we're talking about my specific problem or not, I know you're keeping that in track. And that is a great sign of exactly what we're talking about, right, you lead that entire group, and we know that you have our best interests in mind, you're going to do everything possible to make sure that we're successful.

**James:** Yeah, there's so many subtle things that go into that, like, not processing people with a countdown timer, putting more weight on topics that would impact more people who are on the call. So they're of more relevance and interest to the majority. Trimming things that may not be relevant to everybody, and parking them to the side to deal with separately or later, or not at all, if they're completely irrelevant.

And to make sure that I'm not just giving the answer, even if I know it. And it's probably going to come out in one of these topics we'll talk about here. So why don't you share some of your tools in the toolkit of being an elite leader?

**Why a leader should have less answers**

**Nils:** Yeah, I think I won't may not get into it today, but that premise, the last point that you just made there is really important. And a lot of people think that getting into a leadership position or being in a leadership position is about having all the answers. And the interesting thing is it's counterintuitive. But the less answers you have, the more successful you will be. And the higher up you go in whatever organization you're in, the less answers you should have.

And so there's a lot more to unpack behind that. But I got a couple really crispy tactical things that anybody listening can put in place right away that kind of represent the 64:4, whereas if you're not paying a lot of attention to this, or haven't historically, or haven't had the good fortune to go through a training program, like you were just describing, then these things aren't going to make some significant impact right away.

**James:** I'm interested in that one. I always knew the answers the whole way through. I was like, this fascinates me that I've certainly seen people in positions of power who seem clueless, like even some of the people in charge of the most powerful countries seem half asleep at the wheel. And you know they don't know the answers, right? It's pretty obvious. Someone else is puppeteering them. But this is an interesting take you've presented. So let's see how that pans out.

**Nils:** Okay, do you want to go down that path? Because that's a different one than some of the tools that I was thinking we could cover. Both are equally valuable.

**James:** I mean, I would like, I'd just personally, I'd love to reconcile, you know, how did I seemingly succeed when I did know the answers versus someone who's clueless?

**Nils:** Okay, good. So let's talk about that. So the backdrop of what you're talking about is coaching. And there are a lot of different terms out there, or not terms, there are a lot of different definitions of what a coach is, right? We have sports coaches, we have work coaches, we have coaches do any number of things, and anybody can technically just stick coaching on the end of their LinkedIn profile or Facebook profile, and they're a coach. Okay?

**James:** Sadly. [laughs]

**Nils:** Sadly, yeah.

**James:** There's a mega industry of like, life coaching and stuff. I don't want to pick on anything in particular, I know there's good people and bad people in every industry.

**Nils:** A hundred percent.

**James:** I've heard some life coaches are just so inexperienced in life and not qualified to be helping other people because they're in such a train wreck themselves. The ultimate question that indicates this for me is when a life coach hears a problem that someone expresses and then they say, Now, if you did know the answer to that problem, what would it be? Like, if there's ever been a more bullsh*t coaching process, then I haven't found it yet.

**Nils:** There is some validity to that line of question in that approach, and there's a balance here. So I am trained as a coach. Over 10 years ago, I went through a leadership coach training program. Much of it was designed to, you know, you could end up coaching in any different discipline that you wanted. It was a toolbox full of tools.

There were several things that after 120 hours of training, I really felt as if this is the core of what it means to be an incredible coach. Number one, the ability to listen. Number two, the ability to be present. And number three, the ability to ask powerful questions.

And so the coaching mindset, I think, is the most important piece of all of this, which basically says in my view - this is my own personal view, based on all my experience - is that I don't have the answers, and if I don't have the answers, the only thing I can do then is ask questions and help people discover the answers for themselves.

Now, I will say that the example that you just shared there is a great one, because even if they have no clue, sometimes somebody will be able to make a leap and have a discovery just based off of the coach being present and asking that question, and then thinking about it in a different way. Now, sometimes people cannot see the other side, even when it's right in front of them.

And they need some form of, you know, a bridge to get from where they are to where they are. And this is where I think you do a really great job. And what that bridge looks like is when you share an example of something that worked in the past, but the key is you do not tell the other person, This is what you need to do.

You share the example and then ask a powerful question of, What could you take from that example that might apply to your situation? And the whole goal of this dynamic is to help the person see the situation and the challenge, the problem they're working through, through different angles. And that's when the gears in the brains start turning, and all of a sudden, light bulbs pop and they're, like, I know exactly what I need to do.

So the reason why it's so important for the coach not to have the answer is because when people come to the answer themselves, and it was their conclusion, even if it was the exact same thing you would have told them, they will be 80 percent more likely to follow through with that solution than if you just told them what to do.

And so telling them what to do builds bottlenecks, and people are always going to come back to you asking the same question. When you help them discover the answer, then they're going to be in a much more sustainable place where they build skills and build trust that you will help them find the answer, you're not just going to hand it to them on a silver platter.

**Knowing the answer versus not knowing**

**James:** So to be a bit picky, I'm talking about the difference here of if you have a coach who doesn't know the answer versus a coach who knows the answer, but doesn't tell them the answer, but has them work it out. And this is what I think the problem is with things like ChatGPT, AI, etc. You've got all these people using tools to give outputs. But there's no context or qualification to be able to give an indicator or comfort or security that they're actually on track or not.

**Nils:** Right. Now that's a hundred percent right. And I think, you know, when you shared some things before I signed up for your program couple years ago, either in podcast or on your membership page, and it talked about the value of finding someone who has done what you want to do, and then paying them to follow the path and take the shortcut.

And that was like, I keyed in on that right away. It's a hundred percent. I was like, James built exactly what I want to build. He already knows what it is. But he's not just sitting there telling me every week, blah, blah, blah, do this. Right? You are asking me questions and helping me think of things based on your experience, and then leading me to discover the answers. And I'm like, I know exactly what I need to do next, which is what I walk away with at the end of every call.

**James:** And in that case, I might know instantly what you're supposed to be doing. But I'll lead you there. Right? Because I know if you work for it, you will get the result, as you just said. But my concern is for people who don't actually know what the answer is, how would they know if that person's making progress or going the opposite direction? That's all.

**Nils:** Well, I think that's the ultimate question when you're looking for, in my case, a leadership coach, or your case, a business coach, have they accomplished what you want to accomplish? You know, I tell that to everybody.

**James:** So if that qualifies there, and if you do happen to be in a role where you don't actually know the answers, then just asking questions is a good starting point, is what I'm hearing

**Nils:** Oh, a hundred percent. Absolutely. You can get a long ways, even if you're not a coach, if you're just working with a team, by simply bringing other people into the conversation will dramatically change the dynamic of your relationship guaranteed, and nearly overnight. When I've taught my coaching tools that I have inside the B2B Leaders Academy, within 30 days of these leaders implementing it with their team, they see dramatic changes in their team.

Ownership being taken, initiative being taken, things they never saw before. Many of them have even had unsolicited feedback, come back and say, You know, I really appreciate the change that you've made and how you work with me and helping me to figure out these solutions. I'm feeling energized, I'm feeling good because they're actually using their brain. And that's what we want.

**James:** And I feel we've got a bit of that dynamic in our weekly group calls where we're now, we're actually a team because the people, for the most part, know each other now, they understand each other, and we're actually collaborating, and it's actually more rewarding than the individual calls that I do.

**Nils:** Yeah, I enjoy it tremendously.

**James:** Someone like you, you feed off that, I know for sure.

**Nils:** Oh, 100 percent.

**James:** Yeah, it's great. And lots of opportunities present themselves. but just also by hearing other people's questions that you didn't think to ask is very informative that, you know, I'm not going to sit around and invent 20 questions that someone might hypothetically ask that you could sit on and listen to on a one-to-one call, it's going to be really more on what the person brings to the table. So there you go.

Well, let's go into some of the things that we should know about leadership.

**Nils:** Okay, so the coaching piece, as an incredibly important place, there's a lot of skills behind how to do that effectively, part of the B2B Leaders Academy, if you want to know more, check out B2B Leaders Academy.

**James:** So basically ask, don't tell.

**Nils:** That's in its simplest form.

**James:** You want to be a great leader, ask your team more than you tell your team.

**Nils:** Yeah, except that you are not the source of information, you are the source of questions. And that will totally change the dynamic.

# The give and take of feedback

Okay, a couple other really important crispy tactical things you can put in place right away. Number one, feedback. Alright, so Harvard did a study a little while ago, and asked 1000 or 2000 leaders, and just employees and companies, What's the number one thing you want the most?

And the resounding result was negative or corrective feedback. Seems logical, because people want to know how they can learn and grow. And that was the thing. Now, they also asked, What's the thing you like to do the least? And the interesting thing was, it was the exact same answer, give negative or corrective feedback.

And so it's really interesting when we look at the dynamic that the thing people want the most is actually the thing people want to do the least. And my belief and just hypothesis on why that's the case is that people don't have a reliable, consistent structure to give feedback every single day in a way that is objective and meaningful, and designed to bring somebody else into the conversation as opposed to just feeling uneasy about telling them they "did something wrong".

Right. So feedback has to be at the top of the list, and is just paramount that not enough feedback in any capacity is given in the world today.

**James:** So any ideas on how we might do feedback?

**Nils:** I happen to have a three-step feedback made simple system, James. And I'll go over it really high level here. And then I have a thing on my site where you can sign up and go through three five-minute videos, and I'll walk through in more detail and present some examples so you can see it in action, and then put it into place right away.

So number one, and this is the structure of how to give feedback in a consistent repeatable way. Number one, here's what I observed. This has to be observable, objective, fact-based things, irrefutable. So there is no assumptions. Remember, we talked about assumptions before? We've got to remove those entirely.

You know, you always, you never, no generalizations. This is observable facts. In the team meeting on Tuesday, you said quote, and then the exact quote of what they actually said, like that objective, undeniable, right? So we say, Here's what I observed. And then undeniable, objective-based fact, that's step one.

Step two then is, here's the impact that had. So the reality is, most times when people are doing anything, they have no clue what the real impact of what they're doing actually is. So we have to share what the impact is. And this is your interpretation of this. So in the team meeting on Tuesday, you said, quote, X, the impact that had is, Y, right? So this is your interpretation, but it's very specific about the impact.

Now, here's step three, and in the negative, corrective case, it is one simple, very powerful question. Help me understand what's going on. And the reason why it's so important to ask a question here is because there's always some other perspective of why somebody behaved the way that they did.

And I can honestly tell you that whatever they did at that time was what they thought was the right thing to do. It may not have been what you thought the right thing to do, but that's what you have to do when you give feedback, is you lay it out objectively, fact-based, you share the impact, and then you ask for their input and help me understand what's going on.

**Feedback on the positive**

So that's option one on the negative corrective. The only difference if we're going to deliver positive feedback is step number three. Steps one and two stay exactly the same. Step three, we reinforce the absolute specific behavior that we saw, right? So if somebody took some initiative on a project, for example, we might say, you know, Here's what I observed, X, the impact that had is Y, and I really appreciate the initiative you took on this project to put this into action. Right?

This is not about saying, Good job. Like, that's a death when it comes to feedback because they were like, Good job on what? It could be on anything. So we have to get really, really specific here. But those three steps are all you need to deliver feedback every single day and help people grow, because they want it more than anything else.

**James:** So, in our Slack channel, we have a Wins channel. And I post things. So if we publish a social media video, and it gets a lot of views, I might screenshot it, and put that there. And I say, this is amazing. Thank you so much. Right? It's very specific, because they know exactly what I'm talking about. And putting that feedback loop is, you know, the activities that you did to create this, I appreciate, you know? So would that be enough? Some kind of a system like that, for a team?

**Nils:** I think if you know, the more specific the better, right? So if perhaps, maybe somebody on your team was taking over a different part of the social piece, maybe the editing piece, and they were now on the editing side of it, right? I know, all of your team moves around to different pieces and they can all handle different elements.

**James:** That's the hard part for me. I wouldn't know exactly who edited it, or who published it, because they really are a very cohesive team.

**Nils:** But you could still say, I really appreciate the editing on this, and the fact that you captured the sentiment that I was trying to communicate so well, that's different than thank you.

**James:** It's better than, The talent on this video is incredible, right? [laughs]

## Confirming what you think

And on that first example you gave, the negative feedback, occasionally, what you thought happened actually did happen, and you're just getting confirmation on that. Right?

**Nils:** Yeah.

**James:** It's like I had a situation where I observed you receive $38,000 cash from the client for delivery of the vehicle. And then you lost it. So the impact is we're now short $38,000. And it's casting serious doubt over your employment situation. So, you know, can you let, what's actually going on here? He's like, Look, I'm a chronic gambler. I have a major problem. And I blew it all at the casino last night.

**Nils:** Yeah. Yeah. That's exactly it.

**James:** Okay, well, that's pretty much what we thought happened. Thanks for the confirmation.

**Nils:** That will happen probably, maybe, maybe 10 percent, if that, of the time. The other 90 percent, the response will be something like, Oh, my goodness, I had no idea that's how that was interpreted, or I had no idea that's the impact of what I did had. Because again, we're all operating from what we think is best. It just happens to be interpreted differently by different people, and that's part of being human and part of interacting with groups. So by sharing that impact, and then asking for what's going on, it's an inviting way for them to say, Oh, you actually do want to know my side of the story? Well, you know, maybe it is confirmation, maybe not.

**James:** I think, the key point is, when a situation happens, it's best not to fill in the gaps or assume things. You need to be a journalist and find out the information first, and check your sources. So I'm doing that at the moment, actually, I'm investigating a situation that happened. But I'm speaking to the people involved. And I'm finding out what it looks like from their point of view.

And then I'm piecing together what the situation actually is. And I'm not letting myself have any judgment, I'm not deciding in advance who's done something good or bad. I'm not making any character assertions or assumptions, which are very easy to do, because we're human. I'm just gathering information.

And then the story will reveal itself. And then the parties can be involved at that point, and it'll be easy to solve them. And it turns out, in this case, I don't think anything bad actually happened. It just looked like it. So it's really interesting. It could have burned some relationships if you go in too hot, right?

**Nils:** Right, a hundred percent. Assumptions, it will destroy a relationship very quickly.

**James:** And a big indicator of this is if your staff keep leaving, right? They just don't feel that their point of view is being understood or even given a - it's a kangaroo court, right? They're just being judged and executed without even getting to say their piece.

**Nils:** And they may, if you happen to implement an exit interview kind of process on when people are out, ask you know, what about their experience, usually they'll share some open feedback, chances are they'll say, I didn't receive enough feedback, or I wish I would have received more feedback.

So you know, for everybody listening to this, if you've haven't thought about the amount and value that feedback carries, know that your team today wants more feedback, and you have the opportunity to give it to them through this very simple feedback made simple system. If you want to get the full details, can I share the link, James, to the free thing they can go through? Is that cool?

All right. So it's b2bleadersacademy.com/feedback. And I'll take you through three different videos, walk you through it step by step, show you some examples, and give you everything you need to give more feedback so that you can show up as an elite leader in your team today.

**James:** All right, so what else can we look at as a leader? We've talked about being a coach, we've talked about the big one, the feedback. What other things have you encountered in your journey that could be useful for someone who's got a small team and trying to figure it out?

## Expectations and being accountable

**Nils:** Yeah, so the two other things I would put in the 64:4 are expectations and accountability. And, you know, the fun part about these is that everything we've talked about today, maybe with the exception of some of the coaching stuff, is the things that everybody "already knows", right? Everybody knows, oh, you've got to set expectations, oh, you've got to hold people accountable.

But the amount of expectations that are improperly set are off the charts, and the amount of accountability that's driven in the vast majority of businesses is very low. And so when you show up differently, and you set expectations clearly and confidently, and then you drive accountability for the fulfillment of those expectations that were agreed upon, everything tends to take a completely different turn.

**James:** So how do you set expectations? Back in my world, we had an expectations document, it was called Manager's Expectations, or Sales Executive's Expectations, and it listed them in bullet form. And we would say, This is what we're hiring on. This is what your role will be judged against. This is the scorecard. And if we can meet all these expectations, everyone's going to be happy.

**Nils:** That's a perfect example. It's written down, it's documented, it's clear. There's probably a conversation that you had when you were sharing that with the employee or prospective employee. And then an agreement that yes, I commit to upholding those expectations, and you commit to holding me accountable to this. Period. That's beautiful.

**James:** And probably some people don't go to those lengths for some of the entry level or more minor roles or more general roles, they might not have thought about that. They're definitely going to do it for high-level roles, right? The high-stakes games, most people are going to be expecting a mechanism that they could be judged upon. This is something good employees actually look for, how are you going to judge my performance? How will I know if I'm going to be doing a good job? And they crave that information.

**Nils:** Well, that gets to the accountability side, right? Because the high performers want to be held accountable, and there's a myth that goes around, it's like, well, they're a high performer, they just can run on their own. I don't even need to do anything with them. It's like, no, they're a high performer because they've been held accountable. And they thrive when they are held accountable to greater and greater expectations. Right?

So the belief, common belief of, let them be, couldn't be further from what you actually should do, which is set very clear expectations, just like what you shared in that example right there, and then hold them accountable to that. And accountability is one of the most powerful tools, and again, it makes people feel a little bit uncomfortable, because we think, you know, accountability sometimes means being a micromanager.

And it doesn't. There's a fine line between it. But there's a different approach when you're focused on accountability than when you're focused on being a micromanager. And it is night and day. And sometimes, it's as little as just focusing on one word versus another.

**James:** Yeah, I don't like being micromanaged. I'm not sure many people do. We're definitely macro in our business, but I'm thinking back to my role as a salesperson. I would say, I very clearly had much higher expectations on my own performance than what the dealership required was.

Even before that, you know, if you were to go back a long, long time, you know, when I was about 20, 21, and I was debt collecting, our key performance indicator was 15 debt collections per week. So we had to do three per day. This was when I was out in the field, I was driving around collecting money or repossessing. We counted the same, collect the payment or pick up a car was one. And you needed 15.

And I did over 30 one day. And so I was shooting for a much different objective. There were four people doing the role that I was doing out in the field, and I wanted to be the best. Same when there was four telephone debt collectors, I wanted to be the best. And when I went into sales, I wanted to sell the most. And so my expectation was stratospheric.

They actually had a whiteboard. And when you sold a car, you wrote the name on the whiteboard, and that had 10 slots. And my expectation, my minimum expectation was I need to be in having two columns. And so some months I would sell 27 cars, I'd almost fill three columns. And a couple of times, I sold more cars than all the salespeople put together.

So there was six of us. Sold more than the other five. So my minimum expectation became that I will sell at least as many as all the rest of them put together. So the manager didn't have to do much for me, other than keep trouble away from me, like, just make sure I had a clear runway.

**Nils:** Yeah, but you still engaged coaches and found other people to learn from, I know you've told me that story.

**James:** Yeah, I was reading the books. I was the guy at the front door, waiting for the keyholder to show up. I was reading my Tom Hopkins book, and they're like, What are you reading that sh*t for? That guy is probably still schlepping it out, flogging some cars, you know, in the same place, and it'd be quite some time down the track now, we're talking probably 30 years later.

Isn't that amazing? And that book is actually on this bookshelf here. My very first book that I bought when I was 12 is on this bookshelf. So it's 40 years old. And I've had more impact from a $20 book or probably it was $10 back then, than most people have. Just knowing the information is there to get, that's what's cool about your membership.

If you're not a good leader, but you want to be a good leader, you go and find out from someone who has already mastered it and knows the shortcuts. So be a good coach, give great feedback, set clear expectations, have accountability. I'd like an example of an accountability mechanism. Is it a dashboard? Is it a conversation? Is it something else? How do you classify this?

## Nils's favorite accountability driver

**Nils:** So here's my favorite one liner, and it's even half of a liner. So let's say that you set a very clear expectation with your team or a member of your team, whatever it is, about the deliverable of some project. It is discussed, it is agreed to, it is clear. And let's say the deliverable is going to happen, I don't know, today's Monday, and it's going to happen a week from Friday. So we got like a two-week window here.

So my favorite accountability driver is probably around Thursday or Friday of this week. Then send a simple Slack message, maybe it's a conversation, if you're talking email, it doesn't really matter, whatever method is appropriate, vehicle is appropriate. And you simply ask, Hey, are you still on track to…? And then insert what was agreed to.

And the reason why this is so powerful is that all you're focused on is what they already agreed to, which is the expectation. So are you still on track to deliver the feedback report, whatever it is, next Friday? Now, if they answer, yes, you're all set. Piece of cake. If they answer no, then we simply follow up with one additional powerful question, which is, Okay, what do you need to do to get back on track?

This is how you stay out of the micromanager mode. This is how you stay focused on the deliverable of what was agreed to. You still support them, but you are not going to get into how they're going to deliver it, you're just going to make sure they know that that deadline is still there, they have still agreed to deliver on that deadline. And now, they've got to figure out a new path if they've went a different direction or got distracted by something else.

So that is, you know, when we talk about accountability, it can be as simple as that, right? But the key is staying focused on the what, not the how.

**James:** Right. And you know, in your experience, who sets those deadlines? Because we've got a weird thing in my business where when we have a project to do, like, for example, we want to migrate a website, I might say, We're up to the point now where it's time to migrate the website. So maybe put together a list of what you think the steps might be since you'll be doing it. I'm happy to have a look at it if you want me to help you fill in gaps or just see if I can think of anything that's not there. And what would be a reasonable expectation for this migration to occur? And I actually let them set the expectation. Is that normal?

**Nils:** Perfect. Yeah, I think that's a great approach. Whether or not it's normal, I don't know, but….

**James:** Well like, for example, we're just switching back from one episode a week to two episodes a week. And I said to the team in the meeting, Look, we did two episodes a week all last year, we did one episode a week for the last two months. We've got some really interesting stats, it's kind of hard to know exactly what's happening. But one way we can really highlight those stats is to go back to two now for at least a month and see what happens and see what we learn from that.

So firstly, do we actually have capacity to go back two now that we're doing all these little videos? And secondly, if we do have the capacity, then you can choose what week we start going back to two, and I'll leave that up to you guys. And just let me know. And they said, Boss, we think we could do that the week after next would be the first week. Would that be okay?

I'm like, That sounds fantastic. Go for it. That's it. So they're setting their own work schedule. And sometimes I'll give them sort of indicators or preferences. But if they set the expectation, then they're holding themselves accountable to their own expectation. And it certainly doesn't make me feel like I'm an ogre, or a difficult boss, right?

**Nils:** No, no. I think the only thing you could do, and you and your team have a very strong dynamic, you've been working together for a long time.

**James:** We have a very good bond, right. Untypical one, right?

## Keeping things on track

**Nils:** Amazing. The only additional piece if you wanted to layer in that you could is at the end of this week, drop a note in the Slack channel says, Hey, team, are we still on track to launch the two episodes starting next week?

**James:** The thing is, I know that because they do a little daily activity report in the morning and in the evening. And then we meet once a week on Tuesdays for 15 minutes. And so it will always come out where we're up to in the week. I could use that wording, I could say, Are we still on track with the second episode?

**Nils:** Yeah, that's it. The reason why it's so important is that the amount of things that are going on in someone's life are infinite. And there's always something that is going to distract someone from whatever they committed to previously, I call this the BBD, the Bigger Better Deal. There's always a bigger, better deal knocking on your door and my door every minute of every day saying, Pay attention to me, I'm more important than whatever you just committed to somebody else. This happens all the time, right?

So the way we battle the BBD is make sure that what was agreed to is going to happen in a genuine, authentic, seamless way. And this one sentence, one liner is the most powerful way that I have found after lots of iterations and lots of experimentation, to drive that accountability and make sure that just because somebody else's situation changed, and all of a sudden, they had a huge fire with a customer, or they had some personal emergency, or whatever, that the thing they committed to is still at the top of the list and it's still known that it has to get done, or adjustments and resetting the expectations needs to be done.

**James:** So close to the Dan Sullivan line, where you say, What do you need to do to get it back on track? It's very similar to, What would have to happen for this project to get back on track? If that takes the onus off the person, they might say, Well, Nils is going to have to do it, because Charley can't do it anymore. So maybe they have to pass the baton. Who knows?

**Nils:** And a slight distinction there that I would drill in on is, if they were the ones - this has to be done with the person who agreed to the commitment. So it is still their responsibility. Even if they're going to not be the person to deliver it, it is still in their court to deliver. What we have to keep the leader out of is jumping back in and taking over everything because somebody else got a BBD that took them away from it. Right? That will derail everything else.

But if we can stay clear of that, then we'll have a much better chance of simply focusing on what it was. And if they need to get somebody else to finish the project, then that's on them, they can do that. And they can report back. And that's totally fine. But it's their responsibility.

**When there's a record of train wrecks**

**James:** I want a random scenario for you, just put you on the spot. Let's say you've given projects like that several times. Each time, it's turned into a train wreck. You've gone through the feedback process, I observed, this is the impact. Can you let me know what's going on there? You're not getting ahead. What do you do? Do you take everything off that person? Do you coach them forward? Or do you put them somewhere else, like what's in your toolkit?



JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

"Everybody, everywhere, in every business has an opportunity to **prove themselves every single day.**"

- NILS VINJE

**Nils:** There is a certain limit to the amount of times that someone has and at that in these situations. Everybody, everywhere, in every business has an opportunity to prove themselves every single day. Some people are perfectly aligned with their work, will go to town, just like you shared in some of your examples. I've been in the same way. But I've also been in situations where I did a terrible job because I hated the work. And there are people that are not well suited for the roles that they're in. And that's okay.

So if the feedback has been given through the feedback made simple system, if the expectations were clear, if the accountability has been driven, and the performance is below everybody else, then my recommendation in just, you know, full high-level view here, would be probably to exit that person from the organization or find a different role because they're 100 percent not in a place where they can be successful, and that's impacting the team, and the team won't be successful. But those steps have to be there before you can make that determination.

**James:** I love it. You just sort of casually dropped that line, but I liked it. Everyone has the opportunity to prove themselves every single day. I liked that.

**Nils:** You do. And to themselves, and to the business.

**James:** So I've been chatting with Nils Vinje here, B2BLeadersAcademy.com. Nils is in my program. I've been helping him grow the business. I really enjoy working with Nils. Leadership is such a strong topic, I wanted to bring you on and showcase what you've got. I appreciate you sharing this. We've got some great frameworks that we can use today.

So what I'd like as an outcome from this episode, if you've made it all the way through to this point, try and use this tool straightaway. Give feedback in the next 24 hours with your team member, and use that framework that Nils mentioned. We're going to put it all up too, on episode 988 at JamesSchramko.com.

We'll put the notes, we'll put links to Nils's website and to Nils's feedback program. Until next time, Nils. We'll get you back, talk about how your business is going. And also, soon, I'm guessing you must be receiving some equipment soon for your Maldives trip, which I'm as excited as you are for your new equipment. Thank you for involving me in the consultation process.

**Nils:** Oh, you were a huge help. I was drowning in opportunities and vastness of not knowing everything about this world. And you've spent so many years figuring out all the nuts and bolts. Again, I found somebody who had already done what I wanted to do.

**James:** I still asked you some questions first, you know?

**Nils:** You did, you always did. And thank you.

**James:** Like, you know, well, you've tried something before, like, what would you change about that, is very important to inform the next decision. So it's all great. We're having a good time. This is JamesSchramko.com, and we'll catch you on the next episode.

**Nils:** Thanks, James.

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

# Build and lead your dream team with James's help