

The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves.

Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's



ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is an area that has generated a huge range of opinions, guidance and observations. Here we present a few thoughts on some key aspects of leadership to whet your appetite for leadership learning.

Anyone who wants the truth about leadership is going to be disappointed. Over the last few years, the subject has become the focus for a huge number of books and articles, each proposing a different view of what 'leadership' means, what makes a 'good' leader or the 'real' way to better leadership.

The truth is that there is no one set of leadership rules that leaders can adopt in order to improve. But that doesn't mean that ideas on leadership are worthless. They are tools for a job, and we are free to choose the ones that are useful to us in the task of leading thriving businesses in Norfolk today.

One thing is certain: we can't ignore leadership. Those books and articles were written for a reason. Research has shown, quite categorically, that businesses do better when they're led better. But many of those who own, direct or manage businesses - particularly smaller concerns - don't think of themselves as leaders. Their focus is on the business and its work, not on themselves. Leaders who want to be ready for tomorrow's business challenges do need to think proactively

about their leadership style and skills. Natural leaders know instinctively how to respond to tough times. The rest of us need to make learning and personal development a priority, so that we too have the ability to ensure business survival and future success.

Leadership is getting people to work for you when they are not obligated.

Fred Smith, founder of Federal Express

The raw material of leadership is the character of those who aspire to lead. Think about the characters who've made great leaders: Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela. Clearly, no single character profile equates to great leadership. The key is in finding the right style of leadership for the individual - which is different for everyone. There are as many approaches to leadership as there are leaders; every leader is unique because every person is unique. Even so, there are aspects of leadership that resonate for everyone.



It goes without saying that leaders need to know the business they're in and understand how their organisation works. They also need a solid track record of delivering results. But few people achieve senior positions without these things; they are the basic requirements for the job. What makes a competent manager into a great leader?

First is **vision**: articulating what the business is all about, its purpose. Vision is what distinguishes leaders from managers. Managers organise, leaders inspire. The leader with vision makes the future real in people's minds by pointing to the distance and saying 'that's where we're going'. By expressing vision with sincerity, enthusiasm and pragmatism, leaders elicit the behaviours required to turn it into a reality. Belief in vision turns people from passive 'employees' into committed, high-performing team members. And vision can't be delegated. It has to come from the top.

Why should anyone buy into your vision? Because you back up your words with action. Leaders **set an example**. If they want people to change, they change. If they want people to learn, they admit to their own mistakes. Showing people that you share their reality - that you need the business to succeed as much as they do - builds

trust. And building trust builds commitment - just as in life outside work. Gaining trust and commitment prepares the ground for motivation to grow.

Motivation is essential because times are changing. Difficult economic conditions mean that businesses can't offer a 'job for life' any more. They may not wish to anyway, because fast-changing markets can transform the landscape in which they operate - overnight.

Such turbulence means that the old bonds of stability and security between people and their workplaces are dissolving. Leaders who want to hang on to talent have to find new ways to motivate good people. Knowledge, and those who control it, are in the ascendancy. What (or who) you know, rather than what you own, defines your commercial edge. If this change hasn't happened in your industry yet, don't worry - it's coming.

Leaders do need **strength**. When growing up, we think of leaders as bold, assertive and brave, like legendary knights or kings. Our parents know that the truth is more complicated: leaders need many kinds of strength. Humility and compassion can be as vital to success as competitiveness and dedication.



*If everything seems
under control
you're not going
fast enough.*

Mario Andretti



Sometimes, business leaders need the strength to tell someone they're wrong, or make a decision that will have painful consequences. At other times they need the strength to admit that someone else has the right answer, or that the direction they've taken needs to change. And sometimes they face the toughest test of strength - letting go.

Being in charge used to mean being in control; now our understanding of what we need to control - or are able to - is changing. When conditions are uncertain, we need to be able to **roll with uncertainty**, recognising and using it as the source for innovation and new directions.

Some business situations are like handfuls of sand: the tighter your grasp, the more slips through your fingers. The best leaders know when to take control and when to delegate, when to direct and when to facilitate, when to take a firm line and when to relax. And their leadership skills mean they feel confident doing whatever the occasion demands.

A big part of leadership - maybe the biggest - is **learning**. Many managers are supremely competent within their comfort zone. As soon as something changes, they're out of their depth, lacking the ability to adapt and rethink.

Businesses led by such people often fail. But in long-lived businesses, leaders use problems to take their learning to the next level - not just by tweaking existing approaches or trying old ones again, but re-evaluating their whole perspective.

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

Abraham Lincoln

This is most likely to happen when the whole business has a culture of learning. More than anyone else, leaders have the power to make this happen. An open, learning leader creates a business in their own image - just as a suspicious, defensive one does.

This programme is here to enhance your leadership learning, to ensure long-term success in your business.

Tom Penney
Columbus Project Leader

