

Be the Kind of Leader People WANT to Follow

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The topic of effective leadership has been written about in a myriad of different ways over the years. A quick web search of 'leadership books' turned up works as diverse as a compilation of Winston Churchill's best speeches to advice from elite sport coaches and from amazing stories of human survival to stories about the rise of successful companies like Starbucks. To add a bit of confusion to the mix, many authors have explored various leadership styles – from 'pacesetter' to 'affiliative' and 'authoritative' to 'democratic'. So, if you are seeking information that will help you develop your leadership abilities, you could be forgiven for not having a clue where to start!

In 2016, I decided to invest time and money in becoming a certified leadership coach through the John Maxwell team. John Maxwell is the author of over 70 books on the topic of leadership and, in my personal experience, a genuinely amazing human. Over the course of my 28 years in the business world, I have had the opportunity to try out multiple concepts and leadership styles for myself and have come around to what I believe is a sensible plan to develop my own leadership ability. Because, as John says, being a leader is being able to INFLUENCE others effectively.

The first step is to get in touch with YOUR 'why' or your purpose. Simon Sinek wrote a very powerful book called *Start With Why* that explores how the most successful leaders over the past 100 years have used their ability to inspire in order to lead their teams to achieve great things. It is this ability to inspire that really intrigues me. I believe we, as leaders, can only be inspiring when we have an absolutely clear understanding of why we do what we do – a purpose. Consider for just a moment a business or person you really respect and admire. Do you respect and admire the business solely because of the **product** the business produces or admire the person solely because of their **position** or status? Or is it the business' or person's values, purpose or 'why' that resonates with you? I would bet that in every case, you admire that business or individual because of what you know about their purpose – that it is inspiring in some way.

'So, once I've got my why sorted out what do I do next?', you ask. In my view, there are 3 other keys to becoming a better leader: 1.) your ability to focus 2.) projecting the right energy and 3.) empowering others to step up. Let's look at these one at a time. When it comes to focus, Peter Drucker once famously said – *management is doing things right, but leadership is doing the right things*. How often do you find yourself focusing on the wrong things? By wrong things I mean those things that don't really add value to your business or to your team. 'Wrong' things are often those tasks that are initiated by others or things that don't really require our special skills. When we focus on the right things – things that we initiate and things that we can apply our special abilities to in our businesses, THAT'S when we really move forward.

Let me share a fictional example: Joe is the owner of Allied Engineering. He knows exactly what the business' purpose is and he lives and breathes it; however, his days are dominated by tending to the 'day to day' and he rarely invests time in reviewing his financial performance, fleshing out his big-picture marketing strategy or training his small team to help *them* understand the business' 'why' and upskill. By never setting aside time in his week to focus on tackling the really important activities, it is highly unlikely that Joe will ever become the kind of leader who inspires those around

him to accomplish anything great. John Maxwell says our level of success is determined by our leadership abilities.

Being able to focus on the right things means being able to identify what those 'right things' are for YOUR business. It means being able to manage distractions and effectively delegate things that don't require your special talents to others who are better equipped to carry them out. Being able to focus means setting boundaries around your space and time. If YOU do not respect your time, no one else will.

The next key to becoming a better leader is to project the right energy. The people around you 'buy' your energy, whether it is positive or negative. So, ensure that you are consciously choosing to project positive energy. As your energy goes, so goes your business. When you allow your mood to dictate how you behave around your team, they will have no idea what to expect from you as their leader. Being inconsistent could cause them to feel fearful and uncertain each day, which can be quite de-motivating. Great leaders do their absolute best to always project an attitude of what I like to call 'realistic optimism'. We are all human, and we all have bad days and personal challenges that can influence how we behave at work. The key to managing these things as a leader is not to allow them to become a hindrance or threat to positive, respectful communication with your team.

Sometimes our energy can be influenced by the nature of the relationships we have with our team members. Here's an example: Joe (the owner of Allied Engineering) has had a difficult time keeping his personal friendship with his team member Bernard in perspective. He often confides in Bernard at work about his personal challenges and shares his negative energy. Joe then finds it difficult to inspire Bernard and hold him to account when it comes to the day-to-day tasks that Bernard is responsible for. I like to call this the 'Leader/Friend' conundrum. It can be really hard to separate our personal friendship with a team member from our professional relationship with them at the office, and this can lead to all manner of misunderstandings, poor behavior and lack of productivity. Great leaders have learned how to establish boundaries with their team members in order to maintain positive energy and focus while at work.

Finally, when you empower others around you to step up is when you truly begin to experience the satisfaction that comes with being a great leader. In my view, empowerment begins with clear, effective communication. The best leaders I have known have developed the ability to speak and write concisely and clearly. They have a knack for being able to communicate complex concepts in a simple way. They speak powerfully - from the heart - and often bring conversations back around to the big picture and the 'why'.

Great leaders are also masters at clarifying expectations and asking challenging questions. One of my long-term coaching clients instituted a system of conducting 'development reviews' with each team member and has been astounded at the quality of the conversations that have occurred. Even though he had owned his business for 17 years, he had never invested the time to really get to know his team members on a 1-to-1 basis as it related to their work. As a result of holding these conversations every few months, he now has a clear understanding of what types of activities they most enjoy, what lessons they have learned and what skills they are focused on so that he can support them. Holding these regular 'development' conversations (not a 'review' and not tied to pay rises) has made an enormous difference to the team's level of buy-in as well as to what they've been able to accomplish together.

There is so much more I could write on the topic of what goes into becoming the kind of leader that people WANT to follow, but I think it really all comes back to being crystal clear on your purpose and your WHY. Everything else – the focus, the energy and the skills to empower - follow on from that. So, if you have not invested time lately in a bit of self-reflection, I would highly suggest you set time aside to do so. Have a good think around what keeps you coming back to your office every morning. What turns you on about doing what you do? Most folks who own businesses are not in it for the money, so what ARE you in it for? Lifestyle? To make a difference? Once you can articulate that to yourself with conviction, start paying attention to how else you invest your time – are you accomplishing your highest R.O.I. activities each week? Take a good look at your energy and how it affects everyone around you. And finally, make it a point to get one-on-one with each of your team members (or yourself, if you work alone) and examine what their strengths are, what lessons they've learned in the past few months and what they would like to develop (skills, confidence, speaking ability, etc) over the coming few months. Then go! Do! Take action!

Jennifer Myers brings 28 years of business experience, an MBA and an international perspective to the table for her clients. She coaches leaders to better performance. She trains teams on a wide variety of topics. Her specialty is supporting her clients to get focused and get into action so that they achieve better results.

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