

What is Leadership?

(Updated: June 16, 2017)

Leaders make great things happen. Leadership is the indispensable ingredient for success.

In business . . . in education . . . even in social settings . . . great leadership is always at the core of every great success.

What is Leadership?

- **Vision**
- **Inspiration**
- **Dedication**

The value of great leadership has been apparent for centuries. Alexander the Great lived from 356 BC to 323 BC - almost 2,500 years ago! He was tutored by Aristotle, perhaps the greatest philosopher and educator in Western history. Through Aristotle's tutoring and his own experience, Alexander learned that leadership was essential to any great undertaking (which in his case meant conquering the known world!).

Here is a statement attributed to Alexander:

"An army of sheep led by a lion is better than an army of lions led by a sheep."

This isn't a quotation about animals or their behavior. This is a quotation that clearly states: effective leadership can help *any* group of individuals achieve wildly successful outcomes.

(Alexander was also credited with the following quotation: *"There is nothing impossible to him who will try."* So perhaps Alexander was the original entrepreneur!)

Leadership has changed and evolved over the centuries. A modern definition would be: **Leadership is the hands-on pursuit of excellence, where dedicated leaders provide vision and inspiration to their team members.** According to author and business consultant F. John Reh, in his article *Leading and Vision in Today's Business World*:

Leading and Vision in Today's Business World

A leader was once seen as someone who presided from on high, dispensing wisdom, reward and discipline. The historic view of a leader was of someone in command and control who took a strong role in issuing directives and enforcing their execution while remaining at a distance from the daily work.

A new era demands a different approach.

As times have changed, so has the role of a leader. Today's leader is focused on identifying and developing talent while laboring to create a healthy environment that allows individuals to apply their talents and skills in pursuit of key objectives. Creating this effective work environment requires that the leader focus on instilling and reinforcing key values, on modeling proper behaviors, and on instilling a sense of accountability to help teams and work groups succeed with their tasks.

Today's leader is in the middle of the action, providing support and ensuring proper direction instead of leading his team from on high.

Leaders must:

- Engender trust
- Provide clarity for direction
- Take responsibility for their team members and their team's results
- Guide a continuous strategy refinement process
- Cultivate and motivate high individual and team performance
- Support experimentation and learning
- Develop talent
- Guide decision-making
- Teach
- Establish and ensure accountability
- Develop and support core values
- Communicate with transparency

written by F. John Reh, available on the website thebalance.com

There is a subtle difference between "leadership" and "management" in a business - they're different skills, but clearly related. A new venture or small business needs individuals capable of both.

- *Leaders* create a vision for the organization, inspire team members to pursue that vision, and then provide a hands-on role model of dedication in pursuing that vision.
- *Managers* are responsible for helping individuals and groups organize themselves efficiently to pursue that vision, controlling and directing "resources" (meaning money, people, reputation and contact networks) to optimize results.

We'll explore this difference in greater depth in the next section, *Key Characteristics of Entrepreneurs and Small Business Leaders*.

The most important acts of effective leaders?

- 1) Reflection - great leaders *think* about what needs to get done. While great leaders are hands-on team members, they're also disciplined enough to take time to *think* about what is, what could be, and how to get to a better future.
- 2) Creation - great leaders are capable of developing a vision of *what could be*, rather than being satisfied with *what is*.
- 3) Communication - great leaders then take this vision and communicate it relentlessly and effectively to team members. They are typically (but not always) outgoing people who feel comfortable engaging with others. They enjoy the act of meeting, talking and working with strangers as well as colleagues.
- 4) Motivation - great leaders generate enthusiasm among team members. You'll often read the word "passionate" when you read about great leaders. In this context, "passionate" means the leaders are dedicated to the vision they've created, and relentlessly provide encouragement to team members to "embrace" that vision.
- 5) Celebration - great leaders know when it's time to celebrate. A small victory or a large victory - either one can be the reason for a celebration. And even a dead-end or a failure can be the opportunity for the leader and the team to diagnose what went wrong . . . come up with a new approach . . . and once again embark upon their vision, this time with a slightly new approach and renewed enthusiasm.
- 6) Reflection - great leaders then start the cycle all over again. They know that they must adapt their efforts over time, based on what the team achieves, what team members learn, and how the marketplace evolves. The business world is a dynamic environment, full of constant change. Great leaders know when it's time to step back . . . *think* about what's going on, what's going well, and where there are warning signs, new opportunities and/or new challenges . . . and once again develop a vision of *what could be*.

Effective Leaders

- Reflect on an opportunity or challenge
- Develop a vision for capitalizing on the opportunity / addressing the challenge
- Mobilize team members to pursue this vision with energy and dedication

Effective leaders are driven by a passionate belief in the vision they've developed, and successful when they communicate this vision in motivating ways to team members.