What Makes a Great Leader?

Focus

“Things have been said that leadership is making important but unpopular decisions. That’s certainly a partial truth, but I think it underscores the importance of focus. To be a good leader, you cannot major in minor things, and you must be less distracted than your competition. To get the few critical things done, you must develop incredible selective ignorance. Otherwise, the trivial will drown you.”

—Tim Ferriss, bestselling author, host of The Tim Ferriss Show

INSPIRATION

“People always say I’m a self-made man, but there is no such thing. Leaders aren’t self-made; they are driven. I arrived in America with no money or any belongings besides my gym bag. But I can’t say I came with nothing: Others gave me great inspiration and fantastic advice. And I was fueled by my beliefs and an internal drive and passion. That’s why I’ve always been willing to offer motivation— to friends or strangers on Reddit. I know the power of inspiration, and if someone can stand on my shoulders to achieve greatness, I’m more than willing to help them up.”

—Arnold Schwarzenegger, former governor of California

Integrity

“Our employees are a direct reflection of the values we embody as leaders. We’re playing from a reactive and obsessive playbook of needing to be right instead of doing what’s right. Then we limit the full potential of our business and lose quality talent. If you focus on becoming authentic in all your interactions, that will rub off on your business and your culture, and the rest takes care of itself.”

—Guy Raz, host of How I Built This, National Geographic
**Passion**

"You must love what you do in order to be truly successful at something. You must obsess over it and let it consume you. No matter how successful your business might become, you are never satisfied and constantly push to do something bigger, better, and greater. You lead by example not because you feel like it's what you should do, but because it is your way of life." — Joe Perez, co-founder, Taskare

**#7 INNOVATION**

"In any system with finite resources and infinite expansion of population—like our business, or like all of humanity—innovation is essential for not only success but also survival. The innovators are our leaders. You cannot separate the two. Whether it is by thought, technology or organization, innovation is our only hope to solve our challenges." — Aubrey Marcus, founder, Onnit

**#8 PATIENCE**

"Patience is really courage that's meant to test your commitment to your cause. The path to great things is always tough, but the best leaders understand when to abandon the cause and when to stay the course. If your vision is bold enough, there will be hundreds of reasons why it 'can't be done' and plenty of doubters. A lot of things have to come together—external markets, competition, financing, consumer demand and always a little luck—to pull off something big." — Dan Brian, CDO, WhipClip

**#9 STOICISM**

"It's inevitable. We're going to find ourselves in some real s*** situations, whether they're costly mistakes, unexpected failures or unscrupulous enemies. Stoicism is, at its core, accepting and anticipating this in advance, so that you don't freak out, react emotionally and aggravate things further. Train your mind, consider the worst-case scenarios and regulate your unhelpful instinctual responses—that's how we make sure s*** situations don't turn into fatal resolutions." — Ryan Holiday, author of "Ego Is the Enemy" and the founder of the Milo and Omsiyah Digital Design, Foundr Systems

**#10 WONKINESS**

"Understanding the underlying numbers is the best thing I've done for my business. As we have a subscription-based service, the biggest impact on our bottom line was to decrease our churn rate. Being able to nudge that number from 6 percent to 4 percent meant a 50 percent increase in the average customer's lifetime value. We would not have known to focus on this metric without being able to accurately analyze our data."

— Sol Orwell, co-founder, Beamine.com

**#11 AUTHENTICITY**

"It's true that imitation is one of the greatest forms of flattery, but not when it comes to leadership—and every great leader in my life, from Mike Tomlin to Olympic ski coach Scott Rawles, led from a place of authenticity. Learn from others, read autobiographies of your favorite leaders, pick up skills along the way, but never lose your authentic voice, opinions and, ultimately, how you make decisions." — Jeremy Bloom, co-founder and CEO, Integrate
Open-mindedness

“ONE OF THE BIGGEST MYTHS IS THAT GOOD BUSINESS LEADERS ARE GREAT VISIONARIES WITH DOGGED DETERMINATION TO STICK TO THEIR GOALS NO MATTER WHAT. IT’S NONSENSE. THE TRUTH IS, LEADERS NEED TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND WHILE BEING FLEXIBLE, AND ADJUST IF NECESSARY. WHEN IN THE STARTUP PHASE OF A COMPANY, PLANNING IS HIGHLY OVERRATED AND GOALS ARE NOT STATIC. YOUR COMMITMENT SHOULD BE TO INVEST, DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN GREAT RELATIONSHIPS.”

—Dagmar John, Chief Strategic Officer, PayPal

#13

Decisiveness

“IN HIGH SCHOOL and college, to pick up extra cash I would often refereee recreational basketball games. The mentor who taught me how to officiate gave me this piece of advice that translates well into the professional world: ‘Make the call fast, make the call loud and don’t look back.’ In marginal situations, a decisively made wrong call will often lead to better long-term results and a stronger team than a wishy-washy decision that turns out to be right.”

—Simon Sinek, New York Times bestselling author of The School of Greatness

#14

Personableness

“We all provide something unique to this world, and we can all shine when someone isn’t being real. The more you focus on genuine connections with people, and look for ways to help them—rather than just focus on what you can do for you—the more likable and personable you become. This isn’t required to be a great leader, but it is to be a respected leader, which can make all the difference in your business.”

—Lewis Howes, New York Times bestselling author of The School of Greatness
EMPOWERMENT

“Many of my leadership philosophies were learned as an athlete. My most successful teams didn’t always have the most talent but did have teammates with the right combination of skills, strengths and a common trust in each other. To build an ‘overachieving’ team, you need to delegate responsibility and authority. Giving away responsibilities isn’t always easy. It can actually be harder to do than completing the task yourself, but with the right project selection and support, delegating can pay off in dividends. It is how you truly find people’s capabilities and get the most out of them.”
—Shannon Pappas, senior vice president, Beachbody LIVE

Positivity

“In order to achieve greatness, you must create a culture of optimism. There will be many ups and downs, but the prevalence of positivity will keep the company going. But be warned: This requires fearlessness. You have to truly believe in making the impossible possible.”
—Jason Karr, CEO, Mekanism

Generosity

“My main goal has always been to offer the best of myself. We all grow—as a collective whole—when I’m able to build up others and help them grow as individuals.”
—Christopher Pulver, CEO, Ideo26

Persistence

“A GREAT LEADER ONCE TOLD ME, ‘PERSISTENCE BEATS RESISTANCE,’ AND AFTER WORKING AT FACEBOOK, INTEL AND MICROSOFT AND STARTING MY OWN COMPANY, I’VE LEARNED TWO MAJOR LESSONS: all great things take time, and YOU MUST PERSIST NO MATTER WHAT. THAT’S WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A LEADER: WILLINGNESS TO GO BEYOND WHERE OTHERS WILL STOP.”
—NOAH KAGAN, CHIEF SUMO, APPSUMO

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**#19 Insightfulness**

“It takes insight every day to be able to separate that which is really important from all the incoming fire. It’s like wisdom—it can be improved with time, if you’re paying attention, but it has to exist in your character. It’s inherent. When your insight is right, you look like a genius. And when your insight is wrong, you look like an idiot.”

— Raja Bhakta, founder, Whistle Pig Whiskey

**COMMUNICATION**

#20 “If people aren’t aware of your expectations, and they fail short, it’s really your fault for not expressing it to them. The people I work with are in constant communication, probably to a fault. But communication is a balancing act. You might have a specific want or need, but it’s super-important to treat work as a collaboration. We always want people to bell on their thoughts and ideas—that’s why we have these very talented people working with us.”

— Kim Harlandhik Rasen, partner, TAO Group

**#21 Accountability**

“It’s a lot easier to assign blame than to hold yourself accountable. And if you want to know how to do it right, learn from financial expert Larry Robbins. He wrote a genuinely humble letter to his investors about his bad judgment that caused their investments to falter. He then opened up a new fund without management and performance fees—unheard of in the hedge fund world. This is character. This is accountability. It’s not only taking responsibility; it’s taking the next step to make it right.”

— Sandra Cameron-John, senior vice president, M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment

**Restlessness**

“It takes real leadership to find the strengths within each person on your team and then be willing to look outside to plug the gaps. It’s best to believe that your team alone does not have all the answers—because if you believe that, it usually means you’re not asking all the right questions.”

— Nick Wooley, global director of marketing, Dance Shoes

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