

# Lead the Way! | Extraordinary Leadership



What is leadership? What makes a good leader? What makes people want to get on board and own a cause or take some stance, against all odds? Here are eleven characteristics we have seen in great leadership.

Looking at the various social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc., we cannot help but see dozens and dozens, if not hundreds of quotes made by people that have been worthy of archiving and regurgitating over and over, again. While many, if not most of the quotes have some immediate, perhaps motivational value, all of the quotes are part of the legacy these people left – an extraordinary legacy that is worth following.

These people were leaders. How do we know? People are following them today. As Dr. Bruce Winston of Regent University says, “If you look behind you, and no one is following, you are not a leader.”

If that is the case, what are the things that will inspire people to follow someone?

- Vision – While this term is thrown about, perhaps to the degree that it does not have the value it once had, it

is still true. When someone says, “Hey – I want to go out to lunch,” they are creating a vision. They haven’t gotten there, yet. They don’t even have all of the details, such as where they will go or what they will order. They just created a vision that they probably feel will be a positive experience.

- Communication – Just imagine, if the idea of going out to lunch was never articulated. It was just a thought that no one knew about. Could anyone join in? Perhaps, they also might wish to go out to eat. Perhaps, they are waiting for someone else to come up with the idea.
- Motivation – Motivation will often come by describing the vision, or why other people should get involved with a certain vision. Using the analogy of going out to eat, perhaps that might look like all of the reasons to go, such as:
  - Getting out of the office
  - Enjoying something that did not come from a microwave, a desk drawer or a purse
  - Taking some time to relax
- Understanding – Some people will want details, such as who is going, why are we going, etc. Others just want to go – they just love an opportunity to do *something...anything*. Others will simply follow, not wanting to be the office party-pooper. Others, still, will talk about the idea until lunch time is over. By knowing the members of their team, a good leader can anticipate their needs and manage them appropriately.
- Willingness to Serve – Dictators throughout history have proven time and time again, that dictatorships do not work. We’ve seen in recent history how these dictatorships are being overthrown. On the other hand, we have seen other leaders, who were bent on serving the needs of their followers, become very successful in their *leadership*, regardless of their plans to fill the role. Using the restaurant trip analogy, this might be as simple as going the extra mile to ensure you are

going to a place that most people if not everyone enjoys, making sure everyone is taken care of, etc.

- Anticipating and Reducing Risk – While it may not be a commonality in the description of a leader, a good leader prepares their team for certain types of risk. In the military, we were taught to seek cover, wear our body armor, don't wear anything that can reflect sunlight, etc. The risk was that we could be killed. Our leadership constantly enforced this to ensure that we were safe, but also to minimize the risk that we faced. In our restaurant analogy, you might find a restaurant that everyone wants to go to and relay the knowledge you have about the amount of time it takes to get a plate, or get to the restaurant, etc.
- A Strategy – while not every leader will have a step-by-step plan to get from point 'A' to point 'B' – this is not often the talent of a leader (they tend to be big-picture people – think seeing the forest and missing the trees), they need to understand the major components of how to reach the vision. They will say, "Let's go to McDonald's," versus, "Let's take four cars – Mike's Jenna's, Peter's and Michelle's, and assign four people to each car who will be..." The strategy is your list of objectives – things you must accomplish – in order to reach the vision.
- Execution – making it happen. Leaders don't just talk about what *could* happen. They are the catalyst to *make* it happen...and get other people on board, as well.
- Listening – during the journey of a thousand miles, there are almost always some objections, issues and concerns. This goes back to managing personalities. It is the leader's responsibility to have the answers and be able to articulate them and/or address the ongoing needs and concerns of the followers. Ignoring these needs and concerns will nearly always lead to rebellion. Look at our restaurant trip, again. Just imagine if one of the cars got a flat, and the leader

decided not to stop. What if someone at the table got sick and the leader ignored them. Do you think that leader would continue to have their followers – the people who decided to get together and go out with them?

- Consistency – No one will follow a flakey leader. There is a fine line between listening to the concerns of your followers and being considered a flake – someone who blows whichever way the winds do. Period. If you can't decide which restaurant you are going to, someone else will decide. If you can't decide how you will get there, again, someone else will decide. These are not marks of leadership.
- Confidence – confidence says, “We CAN get there. We CAN do it.” The bigger the project or vision, the more risks and uncertainty exist. Good leadership will continue to motivate and drive toward the vision, measuring every circumstance with sound wisdom and decisive thinking.

While there are many traits and characteristics that make up leadership, and different factors that play into what makes a good leader, the primary goal of a leader is to get their followers from point 'A' to point 'B'. Step up to the plate. Be the leader your company, your team, your community or your clients need you to be. Be [extraordinary](#). Run an extraordinary company.

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# Challenge Everything | Extraordinary Business



There is a video game company called EA (Electronic Arts – <http://www.ea.com/>) that used to use the tagline “Challenge Everything.” As one who, at times, must question the natural order of things, this tag immediately appealed to me. Many of my clients often hear the question of, “Why?” when they propose ideas. The goal isn’t to belittle the idea or thought, but rather, to make sure that the idea is completely thought out.

As business leaders, we need to understand and question everything around our businesses. As someone said to me, once, "You need to inspect what you expect." Even if we feel like we understand certain things, or that certain things appear to be part of the natural order, understanding "why" something is done will often serve to ensure that the product or service or idea does have merits and has been completely thought out.

Understanding how an idea or thought will fit the company mission or help the company move closer to its vision also deserves some inquiry. Clarity on where and when gives you understanding about the timeframe in which you will need to act and finally, determining what resources – people, money, agencies, etc., to accomplish a particular task is another set of questions to be heard.

Part of the effort used in building an extraordinary business is understanding the ways in which your company will best serve its beliefs: its mission, vision and values. While you may have ideas on how YOU might do accomplish a task or address an issue, as a business leader, gathering other peoples' insight – be it employees, clients, vendors, etc., will only serve to help your company do what it does better. Asking questions for greater understanding will help you make good decisions to get your company there.

As EA would say, "Challenge Everything." Be extraordinary. Ensure that your company is on a path that will lead to realized dreams, goals and expectations.

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## **Lower Your Standards! | Extraordinary Business**

**Aim low and you'll never be  
disappointed.**

It was interesting – I was listening to a parenting professional on the radio this morning, who was saying something to the effect of not putting so much emphasis on re-enforcing the standards that our parents place on us, and going with whatever feels good. While it may



not have been her intention, I what I took from this was that, as parents, we shouldn't push our children to be the best that they can be, we shouldn't teach them our standards, that have probably been passed down several generations and the children will turn out to be just fine – balanced, happy, hard-working

citizens that stand for truth, justice and the American way.

Contrast that to the Super Bowl, which played last night. Somehow, I don't think that anyone on that field would have been there had they not gotten the support and push from parents and/or other adults to be the best. It is rare that a child grows up with the focus and dedication required to become the best ingrained into them.

In business, running and growing an [extraordinary](#) business requires the same level of dedication and discipline that it takes to become an All-Star Super Bowl player; it is day in and day out focused work. It is the same dedication and focus on the solid principles that makes any business – your business an extraordinary business:

- A drive to be industry leaders
- Game-changing position, products and services
- A positive impact on the communities they serve
- Implementation of profitable business practices
- A lasting legacy

When business leaders decide that having a balanced life, or pick and choose what feels good out of these principles, they are working from a short-sighted perspective. Just focusing on profitability is typically a survivalist mentality – it does not provide provision for solid business practices. Profitability is only part of the picture. Therefore, putting all of your emphasis on profitability, or any other single principle may make an impact, but not nearly as powerful as an impact as the entity could make.

When we lower our standards and decide that it doesn't take the level of discipline and focus to grow our businesses – extraordinary or not, our results speak for themselves. No one applying minimal effort makes it very far for very long. They are what they call in the culinary world, "A flash in the pan," here today and gone tomorrow.

Don't lower your standards. Your results will mirror your

effort. Go extraordinary.

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# Are you Denting Your Vision??

## | Extraordinary Business

As a young manager, I remember telling an employee that I needed something specific from her, knew that I could count on her to do a good job, which was why I hired her and to go for it. She was a bright woman with all sorts of potential. I honestly believed that she could get the work done, so when she came to me with questions for clarification, I casually shooed her away, thinking that my work was much more important, much more “big picture” than I had time to worry about her. As a leader, I was just concerned about results and moving the company closer to the vision.



Unfortunately, the employee became frustrated and did not create what I had envisioned for her. You see, I did not spend enough time sharing the vision with her. She didn't understand what her work meant, how it fit into the big picture and what the components of the work needed to entail. While I believed that she could do an excellent job, there were specifics that could have enabled her to be more successful in the task, and allowed her to approach the task with much greater confidence.

As leaders, we are often so focused on the big picture or the vision for the company, that some of the details get lost. Making the excuse, "I'm not a details person," doesn't cut it. When you operate like this, it's like having a nice, shiny vision, then hiring someone to polish it with a backhoe: your vision gets dented.

As a business leader, when providing direction, there are at least two things you must take into consideration:

1) Understand that, at the basic level, we are in a buyer's market, meaning that there are more businesses that need business than buyers who are willing to buy. Therefore, businesses, must be willing to adjust their offerings and pricing to attract enough customers to keep their doors open.

The alternative is a sellers market, where consumers will be willing to purchase a product at nearly any price. Gasoline might be an example of a commodity that many people would purchase at nearly any price. Despite the fact that less gas is used in this country than was used five years ago, the prices of gas continue to increase, be it ever so slowly.

2) Every employee you have is a reflection on your business. Furthermore, you hired them to increase your capacity to do business. By not taking the time to provide them with a specific framework of what you are looking for, you are decreasing their capacity and possibly willingness to properly represent your company. Furthermore, if the job you have them do is done improperly, it reduces capacity (you have to adjust what they've done, therefore taking them away from other work), it reduces morale (morale is a driver of productivity) and it could potentially negatively affect your customer experience (they have to wait longer to receive the good or service you are selling them).

While I am not a big proponent of micro-management, I recommend being a big proponent of providing very specific

guidelines that capture, in detail, what you would like to accomplish from any work that you give an employee. To be clear, I am not suggesting that you do the project for your employee, or give them more information than necessary for them to get the job done. This was the point of your hiring them to begin with. You may wish to break the project into parts, to have them check in along the way and share any feedback at that time. It's like taking a soft cloth to polish your vision.

I would recommend showing them how their "cog" fits into the "machine." Especially with respect to younger employees, understanding where their contribution makes an impact on the overall business will earn you much greater commitment from them, which translates to higher productivity and lower turnover. Finding good employees is typically a long, arduous, expensive process. Like customers, it's much less expensive to keep your good employees (emphasis "GOOD") than to find new ones.

Go [ExtraOrdinary](#). Don't let your vision get all dented and scratched up. Take the time to have your employees polish your vision the right way. Repairing the damage will always be much more expensive than doing it right the first time.

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## Extraordinary Business | Refresh Your Vision

As business leaders, we are called upon by our [stakeholders](#) to start, run and grow a business. Regardless of what business we are in, we must ensure that we are moving the company towards some vision that the people we affect can “buy into.” In order to do so, we, as business leaders, need to believe the vision. If your company has lost site of your company’s vision, it’s time to refresh it: get it off the shelf, review it, discuss it, get everyone on board with it and live it out.

Many mission and [vision](#) statements for companies are written, cheered about and put on the shelf, like so many trophies won by athletes. It is something to be done as part of the course for running and growing a successful business. As a result,



the vision statement is forgotten and therefore, not part of the company culture. As the organization grows and new levels of leadership begin to “take the reigns,” the company can find itself severely off course,

especially since evaluation of the their belief systems has nothing to be measured against.

Consider this: All of the cells in your heart are focused on the task of pumping blood throughout your body in a rhythmic pattern. Consider what happens when the heart gets out of rhythm of fibrillation. The heart no longer functions the way that it is supposed to and blood is not pumped through the body. The only way to get the heart working correctly is to “reset” the heart (defibrillate) so that all of the cells get back to their normal rhythm and pump blood throughout the body.

A similar event occurs when one unit or one person in your organization begins to take on their own vision of what the vision for the company should be and starts to work, think and make decisions based on their vision for the company. If your company vision is not clear or known to members of the organization, others may adapt this “alternate vision” and take your company off of the track.

Just as a person cannot serve two masters, a company cannot have two visions.

Thus, it is important not just to have a vision statement, but as you are doing your planning for this year and this quarter, plan to refresh your vision. Ensure that the company has not lost site of where it wants to go, that all of your stakeholders are clear on what the vision for the company is. When you are basing your decisions on your vision, you are thinking strategically. When your whole company is doing so, you are on the path towards building an [extraordinary](#) business.

Run an extraordinary business. Refresh your vision.

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## Don't Just Stand There! Open the Door! | Extraordinary Business

I was working with a client, over the weekend, at his office in Downtown Atlanta. He mentioned to me, when we were walking in, that he had gotten a ticket parking in the same location

that I did. However, there was a 2 hr parking sign there, so I felt like I was safe.

As I was returning to the car, after the meeting, I noticed a Parking Nanny (patrol officer assigned to writing parking tickets) standing at the corner of my street with two other guys. They were talking about writing parking tickets and were debating on whether or not to have my truck towed. As they continued their conversation, I walked down to the truck, got in and drove off. As I drove by them, I saw them staring at me with their eyes bugged and their jaws on the floor. They had missed an opportunity.

This is what happens with many business leaders and super villains. They spend so much time evaluating and discussing their opportunity that they miss out altogether. This is why it is so important to have a plan in place to evaluate and take advantage of opportunities, quickly. This is why you've got to be of the mindset that you are always looking for opportunities.

For example:

- Business mission and vision statements – How will this opportunity effect my company beliefs?
- Job Descriptions – I've met someone who I think might be a good employee – I just don't know what I am looking for or how to leverage their capabilities
- Business modeling – We need to get more space and more vehicles. Based on our current P&L;, how much can we afford?
- Idea Champions – We have great ideas – but they just remain ideas.

All of these are typical scenarios and responses are tools that you, as a business leader, need to use in order to take advantage of *some* opportunities. Of course, this is the short list. Yours will be a bit longer, and practical for your line

of business.

When opportunity knocks, be ready to be extraordinary. Don't just stand there. Open the door!

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## Chaos in the Marketplace | Extraordinary Business

I was speaking with marketing guru [Joel Alpert of MarketPower](#) at an event last week, discussing the idea of positioning and clarity of the marketing message. During our conversation, Joel was kind enough to give me some marketing pointers (I am a strategist, not a marketer, Joel!), one of which was the

importance of presenting your goods and services in a manner so that people can quickly ascertain what what your company offers and who it is targeting.

For example, Aepiphanni is a business strategy company. We help business leaders create extraordinary businesses. If we decided, suddenly, that we wanted to sell memberships to timeshares, potential buyers would begin to doubt us as a company because they couldn't make the connection between business strategy and timeshares.

While, logically, maintaining consistency with your brand is a no-brainer, I cannot tell you how many business leaders I run into who are trying to sell so many things that they really have no identifiable brand or trademark expertise. Their projects, products or services, while good, don't ever reach the potential that they could because the business leader cannot devote enough time to a single focus in order to make it exactly what it needs to be. People are hesitant to purchase from their companies because they don't truly understand what it is they will be purchasing.

This is especially important in the professional services industry, since we are selling experience, education and [Aepiphanni's](#). If we decide that our organizations need "multiple streams of income" and they have nothing to do with our core business, nor serve our core market (see your mission and vision statements!), something is going to suffer.

Keep in mind – the clearer and more aligned your business is, the easier it will be for your potential market to purchase from you. The more scattered your sources of income, the more confused you and your business will appear.

Be extraordinary. Avoid the chaos.

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