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The 5 Characteristics Of Great Leaders



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BILL MCBEAN | 01.24.13 | 6:02 AM

There are essentially five characteristics of great leaders. The first of these is being flexible. Not everything goes as planned. Competitors change tactics, governments force new regulations on business, strikes stop the flow of products, and, occasionally, natural disasters occur. And at times like these, leaders have to be able to change course; that is, first make sure their businesses will survive, and then find a new way to reach their goals.

The second characteristic is being able to communicate. Some leaders are great orators, but speaking well isn't all that's required of a leader. As we all know, there are lots of people who talk a great game but deliver nothing. Leaders who communicate well are those who not only share their thoughts with employees, but also let their strength and personal character show through in their communication, and empower those who work for them by defining the company's goal and showing how to get there.

A third characteristic of great leaders—or, perhaps, group of characteristics—is having courage, tenacity, and patience. Having the courage to stand alone, the tenacity to not succumb to pressure, and the patience to keep fighting until you win the day—and sometimes being able to do all three at the same time—is something you will have to develop if you want to be a true and successful leader.

The fourth necessary characteristic is the

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combination of humility and presence. Acting aloof, or above your employees, does not make a leader. Leaders have to be able to talk and listen to their employees on all levels of the company. At the same time, they must have the respect of their employees, the kind of respect that's earned by being honest, having integrity, and being tough but fair.

The fifth and final characteristic of a successful leader is being responsible. A business owner has to realize that, as the saying goes, "A skunk stinks from the head down," and a business does too. This means when there is blame to be accepted, the owner must be the first one to accept it. But it also means that when accolades are appropriate, they should be spread out among the employees. And when this happens, a leader is born.

The Benefits of Leadership

- Being a leader enables you to be effective and efficient in determining your company's destination and creating a team that focuses on getting it there.
- Being a leader means defining and exhibiting moral and ethical courage and setting an example for everyone in the company.
- Being a leader helps you teach leadership skills to your employees, who will then help do the "heavy lifting" of moving the company from where it is today to where it needs to be in the future.
- Being a leader enables you to recruit, hire, and promote employees who demonstrate leadership abilities.
- Being a leader forces you to analyze your own

strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the company, and enables you to develop a good sense of reality.

- Being a leader helps you dictate appropriate employee conduct while, at the same time, preventing employees from being too tough, ruthless, or mean to other members of the staff.
- Being a leader helps you emphasize the value of the company's customers, how they are treated, and the importance of their returning.

The Realities of Leadership

- Your company can meet the goals you establish only if you lead the way by motivating and encouraging your employees to become a coordinated team focused on the destination.
- When you are leading your company into a "New Frontier," because neither you nor your employees have been there before, mistakes, miscues, and inexperience add to the challenge, and your leadership is key to meeting that challenge.
- You have to understand and be good enough at leadership to teach it to your employees, both by example and by coaching. The more leaders you can develop, the stronger the business will be, and the less you will have to worry about how the business is operating.

In exhibiting leadership, there are essentially three things you must accomplish if you hope to make the company a success. These three things don't represent every facet of leadership, but they do form the foundation on which leadership is built and are an integral part of leadership at

every level.

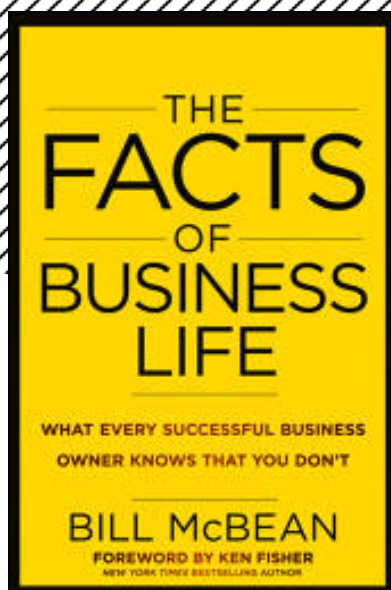
The first of these is achieving the objective. This is not something you, or anyone, can do alone, which means you will have to work with others to accomplish it.

The second is building and maintaining the team. Saying you need a team to accomplish something is one thing, but developing one, and consistently encouraging and motivating it, is something else, and something you must do.

The third and final thing you have to do is develop individuals within the company. In order to accomplish this, you must lead by example, teach employees what leadership means so they can teach their direct reports, establish an environment for success by eliminating excuses, recognize when jobs are well done, have the courage to make the tough calls, and encourage empowerment within certain parameters, among others.

Leadership may mean different things to different people, but in a business, leadership must always start with the owner, who has to define exactly what leadership means to him or her, and then decide what success means to the business. However, being

a leader also means articulating that vision to everyone else in the company, convincing them



of its importance, and encouraging and motivating them to work together to achieve it. And while doing so may come more naturally to some than to others, it's never easy. In fact, as Vince Lombardi, the legendary Green Bay Packers coach, once said, "Contrary to the opinion of many people, leaders are not born. Leaders are made, and they are made by effort and hard work."

If you want to give your business a good start toward success, it has to start with leadership, and leadership has to start with you.

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