



A Leader Leads

Is anyone following?

People *look* for leadership. Even though they criticise and often put leaders down they *want* someone to stand up and take the lead. *Peter Irvine* outlines some important strategies

We see it in politics and sport all the time—a *good* leader won't always be popular but will have a strong following because people look for someone prepared to take responsibility. God looked for leaders who would stand up and be counted to lead his people. In the Bible we see examples of good and bad leaders. If Josiah at eight years of age, could become one of the better kings, we *all* have the opportunity to lead in the church, in business, politics, community and family. What separates leaders from followers?

Desire

Leaders develop a real passion for what they want to achieve. The desire to do something of worth and value will inspire you to take the lead and see it realised.

Ask yourself:

“What do I want?”

“Why do I want it?”

“How badly do I want it?”

Vision

The things that really inspire great achievements are *visionary*, they are not superficial. This applies with individuals, churches, businesses, partnerships and even sporting teams.

When I first took on the job as Managing Director of a large advertising agency in Sydney, the leadership team of working directors were in a slump. I realised I was now in charge so I had better get on with the job and learn along the way, make decisions and take the lead. Clients had been lost and others

were reviewing their options. A series of poor decisions had left the staff with low morale. As a team we needed to show positive leadership so we reviewed where we were going.

First we set the vision for the company. What did we want to be known for? What did we want to achieve? People started to get excited! The journey had just started.

Next we set in place short and long term goals towards that vision. The goals were achievable and the vision came to life, we could **DO** this!

Then the steps needed to grow the business. Steps to retain old clients and attract new ones were outlined. Who would do what and by when? The details became clearer. Everyone had a part to play.

Not only could we do this, but now each person in the agency could say, “I’m important to its success!”

Very quickly the tide began to turn, people responded to positive leadership and vision. During the following two years the agency had record growth.

John Maxwell in his book *Leadership Gold*¹ lists several points that define leadership:

- The willingness to put oneself at risk
- The passion to make a difference with others
- Being dissatisfied with the current reality
- Taking responsibility while others are making excuses
- Seeing the possibilities in a situation while others are seeing the limitations
- The readiness to stand out in a crowd

You do not get there by knowing lots of things, *you have to know how to inspire others*—*they* will often know more things than you do!

- An open mind and an open heart
- The ability to submerge your ego for the sake of what is best
- Evoking in others the capacity to dream
- Inspiring others with a vision of what they can contribute
- The power of one harnessing the power of many
- Your heart speaking to the hearts of others
- The integration of heart, head and soul
- The capacity to care and in caring, to liberate the ideas, energy and capacities of others
- The dream made reality
- Above all, being courageous

Maturity (Wisdom):

There is no such thing as instant maturity or leadership. Remember you are leading people, not robots. You do not get there by knowing lots of things; you have to know how to inspire others—*they* will often know more things than you do!

You need plenty of good old-fashioned wisdom, which takes experience to develop. Remember:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,” (Pro 9:10).

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed,” (Pro 15:22).

“A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool’s eyes wander to the ends of the earth,” (Pro 17:24).

It takes time, effort and many mistakes to learn what works with people. It also takes time for others to trust your leadership and follow you.

Search it out:

- Learn from leaders you respect—watch how they deal with circumstances, how they inspire others, how they handle criticism or difficult issues
- Learn how not to lead from the mistakes of others (rather than your own). Work out how they could have done better
- Listen to good leadership teaching from people who have been successful. The best leadership teaching is found in God’s Word. Try reading John Maxwell’s *Leadership Bible*².
- Keep open to change—be open to genuine criticism, don’t close your mind or think you know enough to get by
- Learn to bounce ideas off others for input and have mentors—those you respect—to share your plans with and be encouraged or challenged by.

When I was given leadership roles early in my career, each step was a challenge. Leadership resources and encouragement were not easily available. I learned by trial and error what worked with people and what didn’t. I was very thankful for a managing director who had absolute confidence in me. So I learned to build the confidence of people in *my* department. Through my own mistakes, I learned how not to solve disputes between staff members by trying to keep them apart and happy (it is far better to have them confront each other and sort out the problems). By

trial and error I found out what I needed to prioritise and what could wait. I very quickly found out a negative attitude did not generate good responses from people work-wise! It also took time for others to accept me as the department head and to earn their respect.

“The purpose of leadership is to take people where they couldn’t go on their own; to inspire and equip to do what they thought they could not do and accomplish what can only be done by a group working together.”

John Maxwell

Again, John Maxwell likes to equate leadership to Crock Pot cooking. It takes time, but the product is worth the wait.

Leadership Keys

1. Get the right people on board

They might look like a bunch of misfits, Jesus’ disciples sure looked this way, but as long as they are the *right* bunch of misfits—motivated, capable, open to learn and ready to do whatever it takes.

At times people will need to move on and if they don’t make the change themselves, you will need to do something. Learn to recognise when someone is holding back an area of the business, church, or organisation. There are times we wait for people we should not have waited for, they continually cause conflict or stress for those around them and do not seem ready or willing to change. Pastor Joel Osteen is quoted as saying, “Your identity is not tied to those who walk away from you.”

One of our franchisees shared with me the problems he was having with a staff member at his store. This person seemed to cause constant conflict with her workmates, the rest of the staff were unhappy working with her and the franchisee was in danger of losing some good people. Yet our franchisee could not face letting her go, this was something he had never done before and the stress was giving him sleepless nights. After encouragement and advice he finally made the change. After taking this decisive action, he was able to sleep like a baby and the other staff members were very happy and relieved. The tone of the store changed dramatically. When I looked at his sales figures following this change they had grown substantially. One person had been holding his business back!

There will be times when others join the team to take you to the next level, times when existing people grow into leadership roles or are trained to take on different areas of responsibility. As a leader you need to be constantly identifying the right people for the right roles at the right time.

2. Learn to let go

You can’t do everything!

That’s what leadership is about—if you insist on doing everything or making every decision yourself, the team will never grow, in fact potential leaders will become frustrated, critical and leave. You will end up with a group of ‘yes-men’ (or women)—people who are incapable of decision making and simply process what you tell them. I have met quite a few people with this leadership style and it certainly puts limits on how far they can grow—whether this is in business, as a department head or even a church.

Highly visible leaders are also highly targeted. Good leaders learn how to function in difficult environments and not lose focus.

Delegate: If you can't delegate you can only grow to the limits of your own time and capability, if you want a holiday, get too busy, or are ill, work piles up and nothing moves forward. In Exodus 18 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law challenges him to delegate his overwhelming responsibilities to capable men.

Jethro says, in Exodus 18:23-24, "If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied. Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said."

Learn to let go: Step back! When you give others responsibility, let them make their own decisions without constantly butting in. No one will do the job the same way as you do, think about it, this could be a *good* thing! There will be some mistakes made, even with the best people but allow these people to learn without undue interference.

It not only frees you to move forward, it makes room for good people to grow to the next level, you will keep them rather than lose them to another employer.

3. Keep it simple

We complicate everything—keep it simple. Giving staff or family a long list of rules only frustrates decision-making. When your people 'share' and 'own' the vision, they want to do the right thing and know that failure is only a step towards success. Marketing companies often create promotions with prizes that are so difficult and complex very few participate. You want many to engage—learn to make life and business as simple as you can.

4. Taking criticism

In a race, the attention is on the front-runners, not on those out of contention. A leader attracts attention so get used to it! Criticism, media challenge, internal disputes will all come to the top so learn how to handle these.

- *Think* before you respond
- *Don't respond in anger* or frustration
- If possible, *wait* before you respond
- *Speak the positive messages* not the problems
- *If incorrect, change* and correct the story
- *Don't over-react* but make sure there is balance
- *Listen to all sides* and listen rather than speak!
- *Have a realistic view of yourself* because you are not perfect!
- *See the experience as an opportunity to grow*

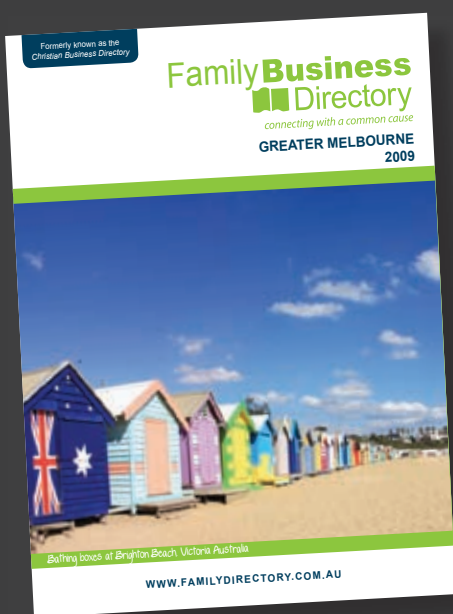
Highly visible leaders are also highly targeted. Good leaders learn how to function in difficult environments and not lose focus. (A)

Peter Irvine

Peter Irvine is the Co-Founder of Gloria Jean's Coffees, author of *Win In Business*, business consultant and speaker.

References

- ¹ J Maxwell, *Leadership Gold*, Thomas Nelson, 2008
- ² J Maxwell, *Leadership Bible, (NKJV)*, Thomas Nelson, 2008



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