

From The Mouths Of The World's Most Successful Leaders - What Makes Them So Good?

We all probably have our own definition of what makes a good leader, based on our personal experiences and our core values. What you think you look for in a leader may be very different to the way you behave when you become one. And what you learn leading people may cause you to challenge your views of leadership—it's not as easy as some make it look.

Ultimately, being a leader is about getting the best out of your people in a way that motivates and inspires them, which then leads to the growth and profitability of your business. Being too placid could mean your business slows and suffers; being too aggressive is likely to undermine and demotivate your staff.

Finding the right balance will depend on your industry and your goals. Spending a lot of time interviewing leaders, some common themes do come up when asking them what's behind their success.

Most attribute their growth to finding the right people and treating them well. Another common theme is not being afraid to take risks, but making sure they are calculated—know your market and take advice from knowledgeable people you can trust. Follow your instincts and your passion; if you are doing something for love rather than profit you are more likely to be successful. And be flexible—markets fluctuate, technology evolves, techniques change. Invest in training your people, keeping your systems up-to-date and keeping yourself on the pulse.

But don't take my word for it. Many of the world's most successful business leaders and motivators are generous when it comes to sharing their secrets—here are my 5 key takeaways from some of the best.

"It's better to hang out with people better than you. Pick out associates whose behavior is better than yours and you'll drift in that direction." Warren Buffet

Takeaway: Don't hire yes men; hire people that challenge you. It is only by being challenged that we learn and grow. Spend time with people that inspire you and that you admire.

"Don't compare yourself with anyone in this world... if you do so, you are insulting yourself." Bill Gates

Takeaway: There is a difference between learning from and admiring others, and comparing yourself to them. One will help you identify your goals and grow; the other will lead you to self-doubt and resentment. Have faith in yourself while being open to criticism.

"If you double the number of experiments you do per year, you're going to double your inventiveness." Jeff Bezos

Takeaway: Creativity breeds creativity. You will not always be right, but you must never be afraid to try.

"Leadership isn't just about legislation, it's a matter of persuading people and giving them confidence, and bringing them together and setting a tone." Barack Obama

Takeaway: Processes, policies and KPIs will get you so far. But if you want your team to be as passionate as you are then you need to think carrot, not stick. Inspire, empower and motivate them. If they are there for more than a paycheck you will achieve more than you can plan for.

"Create a vision and never let the environment, other people's beliefs, or the limits of what has been done in the past shape your decisions." Tony Robbins

Takeaway: Know what you are aiming for and create a positive environment that will bring your team along with you for the journey. Your people expect you to lead them, so lead. Define your objectives, map out the path to get there and go for it, while listening and accepting that there will be unexpected forks and twists in the road. Don't look back, keep your end-goal in mind and enjoy the ride.

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