



Leadership: Take It Personal!

The ability to effectively lead is a crucial factor in the success, or lack thereof, of entrepreneurial ventures. By understanding and embodying what it takes to lead effectively, entrepreneurs can maximize their chances of success. To be successful and grow our business we must be strong in personal leadership. Leaders with this characteristic are people who lead themselves with strength and confidence so that others are inspired to join them. Personal leadership requires a commitment to balance and a sense of purpose and values. If you practice personal leadership you recognize that in order to teach and motivate others, you must first learn to teach and motivate yourself. To be a leader today you must be an agile learner and apply new skills and experiences as lessons are learned under first time conditions. A leader sets the example for employees and coaches them to excel. You may have heard the expression "fail forward". This is the mantra for effective leadership. If nothing is tried, nothing happens. An effective leader tries, fails, learns, adjusts and tries again.

Business owners are naturally self motivated. Starting a business requires it. As our business grows, it gets tricky as we realize we need help. Many wait too long to hire someone. Finally, we take the leap and hire an employee to help us. At first, we feel a sense of relief. We say, "Now I have somebody that can handle those calls for me!" Let's say we got lucky and the employee we hired is doing a fabulous job. We can't live without him or her in that job, they are so good! Until the day that person comes to us to resign, for whatever reason, and a replacement is needed right away. We hire the next person and realize that the person that was doing such a great job didn't create a "template" for the job. The new person doesn't know what to do or where to start. So they do what they think needs to be done and it's not as good as the first person. We start to pay attention to things we didn't have to pay attention to and the business suffers. Two steps forward, two steps back.

What's a leader to do? Whether you have one employee, fifty or five-hundred, a leader needs to recognize his or her role is to communicate a vision and create an environment where employees can do their best work. How does this happen? The first step is to know what your strengths are. If it's in building and maintaining client relationships – do that and hire others to do the things you don't excel at. Before you hire anyone, identify and document the work processes in your organization and identify the roles and responsibilities for each job. Once you have identified a job that you need to fill, you can identify a person who is a match for the job. Follow a hiring process that requires several steps to qualify the right candidate for the job. And hire the person who is passionate about doing that job. Give them the tools and supportive work environment to be successful.

One of the key challenges for a leader is balancing people and tasks. Two common mistakes are when a leader views questions from people as interruptions and when they try to fix mistakes rather than teach people how to fix their own. The desire to help others succeed is the mark of a truly great leader. Synergy is created when a leader truly invests his or her efforts in the success of others. Zig Ziglar says it like this, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care about them." Continue to develop your ability to coach your employees for success. Remember, they need to try, fail, learn, adjust and try again. Give them the room to grow and be there to assist them. Leadership is an art, not a science. As you develop your own leadership style stay focused on your vision and maintain a long term commitment to personal leadership. Over time you will create an inspired organization.

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