

Following your Leader



The No. 1 Thing Holding You Back As A Leader

Leadership isn't nearly as complex as people make it out to be, but that doesn't mean it isn't hard. The big difference between highly effective leaders and those just playing at leadership is often found in their willingness to do what doesn't come naturally or instinctively.



Leadership: Stupid Is As Stupid Does

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I have long held to the belief that leadership exists to disrupt mediocrity. However my observation is that many in positions of leadership tend to protect the status quo (mediocrity's best friend) at all costs. The best path forward for any organization is through the creation of value and by developing advantage – both of which rarely occur by embracing outdated, static, or politically correct thinking.

We live in a world that far too easily suffers fools in leadership. We embrace pseudo intellectuals and idiot savants as thought leaders, we accept poor performance as normative, and we value being politically correct more than we fear being incorrect. As we close out 2014 and head into a new year, I want to encourage you to be bold and think differently. While there are many things I could offer as advice moving forward, I thought it best to share 5 things I believe all leaders should immediately stop capitulating to in order to become more effective:

- 1. Best Practices –** There exists no greater example of herd mentality than that of best practices. I have always believed that a so-called best practice ceases the minute it is labeled as such. By definition, best practices protect the status quo and gate innovation by ensuring people/processes follow the same methodologies. You cannot differentiate by embracing sameness. The concept of best practices is little more than blending to the norm at your own peril. Smart leaders innovate beyond best practices always in search of next practices. If your decision to do something is born by others doing it the same way, you are doing little more than ceding advantage and opportunity to those competitors more creative than you. Don't copy – create.
- 2. Cost Cutting:** It is simply impossible to beat your competition to the future by spending less than they do – you get there first by investing smarter than they do. Companies who outperform their competition focus less on risk management and more on opportunity management. They are less concerned with containing expenditures and more concerned with finding new ways to create greater return on investment. I've often espoused that a leaders' job is not to leverage their people, but to create more leverage for their people. Stop asking your people to do more with less (Stupid) and find ways to provide them with a resource advantage (Smart). Stop imposing hiring freezes (Stupid) and begin a relentless pursuit of creating a talent advantage (Smart). Leaders who complain about a lack of resources are doing nothing more than demonstrating their lack of resourcefulness.
- 3. Political Correctness –** By its very nature, politically correct thinking is most often disingenuous, if not altogether intellectually dishonest. Politically correct thinking replaces individuality and authentic opinions with socially acceptable rhetoric and watered-down behavioral tendencies. I actually miss the days when most conversations consisted of unpredictable, highly charged, and stimulating discourse where people were encouraged to openly share their true thoughts and opinions. The irony of politically correct thinking is that a society void of individual thought actually creates the opposite of diversity. It is in fact politically correct thinking that results in a brainwashed group of sheep who completely lack diversity as a result of

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a generification of thoughts and actions. The dark secret behind politically correct thinking is that it slowly dulls your senses, and neuters your innate ability to be discerning. I don't know about you, but I don't want to hear what you think I want you to say, or what you think you should say, but rather I want to hear what you're really thinking. Have you ever sat in a meeting where all parties sit around the table with a deer in the headlights look trying to figure out how to dance around an issue rather than address it head-on? It is this type of issue that pollutes our culture, stifles innovation, undermines our productivity, and sentences those who embrace politically correct thinking to a life of mediocrity.

4. **Lionizing The Few – Leadership is not a position or a title. It is not a job reserved only for a precious few presiding over the masses. Here's something to keep in mind – if you tell people long enough or loud enough that they're not leaders, you shouldn't be surprised when they begin to believe you. Your job is not to keep people from leadership, but to create leadership ubiquity. The most successful organizations are ones in which everyone views themselves as leaders. Leadership that isn't transferrable, repeatable, scalable, and sustainable isn't really leadership at all. Build your organization on a framework that builds into all team members regardless of where they reside on the org chart.**
5. **Unwillingness to Change – Examine any study on the rate of change, and you'll find we're living in an unprecedented time. The rate of change is clearly outpacing most leaders ability to learn and unlearn. Many leaders struggle to remain current, much less find a way to move ahead of the curve. Here's the thing – if leaders are stuck in the past, their organizations will be forced to travel a very rough road to the future. Leadership isn't destination based – it's a continuum. Great leaders think beyond the outcome. They think about *what if* and *what's next*. They don't get trapped in the journey to a specific destination, but remain in constant search of discovery in order to seek new and better opportunities. Anything in business can be improved, everything can be reimagined, and many things can flat out be eliminated. The harsh reality is this: leaders who embrace “what is” by failing to broaden their worldview will be replaced by those who pursue “what if” by embracing new and creative ways of thinking.**