What makes a Great Leader?
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What makes a great leader?
When you think of leadership, what comes to mind? Leading 1000 hungry souls across a burning desert to safety? Building a company from two guys in a garage to a multi-billion dollar corporation? People who change the world – or at least the world around them?

The fact is, if you’re the person in charge of the team – whether that be a listed company or a team of volunteers on Clean Up Australia day – you’re the leader, and the best leaders always strive to do it better. Or it might simply be that you’re currently part of the team and you’re wondering if maybe, one day, you’d quite like that top job.

If so, read on. Because like anything, great leadership can be learned.

“Leadership skills can definitely be cultivated,” says Emma Isaacs, CEO of Business Chicks. “The first step is committing to becoming a leader – truly deciding that you want to learn. Leadership is hard, and it takes practice, so you want to make sure you’re up for it!”
**Self-awareness is key** as far as Suzi Dafnis, Community Director and CEO, Australian Businesswomen's Network is concerned. “When I started my first business at the age of 27, I wasn’t a good leader – much as I wanted to be. I didn’t have the skill to manage team members in a way that was mature and effective. I learned leadership by really paying attention to it, doing a lot of introspection and honing my communication skills.”

Once she realised that leadership was about setting a vision and empowering people to be their best selves, with a clear, important role in fulfilling that vision, she was on her way.

When you’re **working out your vision**, it pays to think big. “What do you want to see different in the world,” asks Glen Carlson, director, Key Person of Influence Australia, one of the world’s leading personal brand accelerator programs. “Leadership for leadership’s sake is like money for money’s sake – you’re focusing on the wrong thing.”

Instead, he believes, it should be about what you want to get inspired by, what you want for the world, what you want to change in the world. “If the answers to those questions fire you up, you’ll send yourself off on a direction of being a leader,” he says.
“Yes,” says Meredith Fuller, psychologist and author of Working with Mean Girls. “But you have to go for intentional leadership, where you use emotional intelligence and self-awareness, and an awareness of each member of your team.”

She believes the best leaders are those lead through a personal relationship with each team member in accordance with what they need. “It’s a big job because it’s complex,” says Fuller. “It’s always a work in progress and you have to be actively involved. When you take it on, it’s with you all the time.”

Developing leadership skills begins within. “I think it’s always a good idea to be doing some development work, with a psychologist or with a coach, to look at your skills and your blind spots,” says Fuller. “Get a mentor – a leader you value – and do an audit of what you do well and where there’s constructive work to do.”
If you’re hoping to develop leadership skills, Fuller suggests trying volunteer work. “Get involved in community or sporting leadership roles,” she says. “Put your hand up for project work and actively seek out Best Practice in communication models. Develop your understanding of people and your relationship skills.”

Stephen Shepherd, director at AltusQ, a firm of expert leadership and business coaches, agrees. “One of the biggest mistakes I see when I’m coaching is that people don’t invest enough in their own personal awareness and personal development,” he says. “They think ‘I’m the boss’ and that’s it’. They don’t see that if they don’t grow, the business won’t grow.”

How to hone your leadership skills

1. Get involved in community roles
2. Put your hand up for project work
3. Develop your understanding of people
3 steps to becoming a great leader
3 steps to becoming a great leader:

If you’re ready to become a great leader, there are many action points to kickstart your journey. In this section we’ll give you some of the tools and speak with some of Australia’s most prominent leaders about what personality traits are imperative to inspire and motivate others.

1. Study the great leaders
   Read their biographies and listen to the speeches they’ve made. Study how they hold themselves and how they communicate.

2. Find a mentor
   Look for someone in your industry that you admire.

3. Practise
   Volunteer within your community or for extra projects at work.

Nelson Mandela said, “It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.”

Did you know that there are 5 simple traits that all leaders are said to possess? What traits are they and how do you develop them?
5 traits all leaders share
3 steps that all leaders share

Leadership styles can differ, but there are some traits that all leaders have in common.

1. **Study the great leaders**
   - Clear, consistent communication skills

2. **Self-awareness**
   - You must understand yourself before you can lead others.

3. **Lack of ego**
   - Great leaders give credit where it’s due and take responsibility for mistakes

4. **They make decisions**
   - The ability to make a decision, even the wrong one, is a key difference between a leader and a follower.

5. **Resilience**
   - They can stay calm in the face of challenges and bounce back when things go wrong.
The reluctant leader
Are you a “born leader“?

You may have heard that old saying ‘some people are born great, while others have greatness thrust upon them’. The truth is that not all leaders step eagerly into the number one role – they require coaxing.

There are many reasons why you may not wish to take on a leadership role. “For some, it will be fear of being judged, not liked or making a mistake,” says Suzi Dafnis, Community Leader and CEO, Australian Businesswomen’s Network. “It takes guts to put yourself on the line and be willing to be responsible for a team’s results.”

Other reasons may include worrying about longer hours, not really understanding the full nature of the role, or even just anxiety about your ability to succeed. But there are things you can do to help you make the transition – and Dafnis offers the following three tips to help you overcome your fear and reluctance.

“For some, it will be fear of being judged, not liked or making a mistake,”

Suzi Dafnis, Community Leader and CEO, Australian Businesswomen’s Network.
Surround yourself with mentors:
“I’ve always recruited mentors and allies to help me transition between stages in my career. They have given me the courage and direction to keep ‘stepping up to the plate’ and taking on bigger challenges.

Be prepared:
“Developing your skills takes time and preparation. Do what it takes to gain the ability to perform the role.”

Take action:
“Be willing to take action, even when it feels like a risk. Nothing happens until something happens.”

The good news is that a 2014 study by researchers at Cass Business School, London, and University of Lund, Sweden, reported in the Harvard Business Review, found that people are most eager to follow leaders who appeared to be reluctant to be leaders. Of course, the leaders in question were all exemplary professionals in their industry (law), able to allow others to do their jobs to the best of their ability, and able to conduct themselves in an astutely political manner without appearing to do so, but it’s encouraging.
What do you think a leader is?

Then again, perhaps you’re reluctant because you’re not a loud, confident person – and you think that’s what a leader needs to be.

“I think it’s important to remember that different leaders have different styles,” says Glen Carlson, director, Key Person of Influence. “You don’t need to be an extrovert to be a great leader. Warren Buffet, Mark Zuckerberg, and Bill Gates are all examples of introverted leaders.”

For Carlson, it’s a matter of being ‘inspired to lead’. “Fundamentally, if a person is not inspired to step up, it’s because they’re not inspired by what they’re doing,” he says. “You can’t lead something you’re not inspired by. I think you can take someone who’s unwilling to lead in one environment and put them in an environment in which they’re passionate, driven and enthusiastic, and their capacity to take a leadership role – or to want to do so – is magnified.”
Ask yourself why

If you’re not sure about taking on a leadership role, ask yourself why. “Quite often the best salesperson in an organisation or the best technical person in an organisation is put into a leadership role, and it’s just not them,” says Stephen Shepherd, Director, AltusQ. “They don’t enjoy it because what they love – the thing they’re really good at and the thing they get a kick out of – is taken away.”

He suggests that you look at reasons why you’d do it – and reasons why you wouldn’t. “Is it ego driven?” he asks. “Are you doing it because you’re told you need to do it?”

Other questions you might ask yourself include:

- What are your beliefs around leadership?
- What are your thoughts, positive and negative, about taking on the role?
- What will the role ACTUALLY entail?
- What type of leader are you?
- What type of leader is required right now?
“Be aware of your value drivers, your strengths,” says Shepherd. “You might be a great leader in one company, and a terrible leader in another.”

It’s also worth remembering that the world needs followers. “I can’t figure out why being a follower has such negative connotations,” says Meredith Fuller, psychologist and author of Working with Mean Girls. “There are people who are good at being leaders and they love it. Others are good at being consultants or advisors or specialists and they don’t like being a leader.”

She suggests you look at what gives you joy in your work. “Do you get your big ticks from being the sum of all parts, or do you like doing the work yourself?” she says. “A lot of people get confused about that point. Some people like the team moving forward – others don’t like being in a team at all.”

For Fuller, it comes down to communication. “If you’re not interested in communicating with people, then leadership is not for you,” she says. “You’re not always loved.”
The key thing to keep in mind is that leadership can be learned. “I think many people would be surprised to learn that great leaders aren’t born, they’re made,” says Alison Vidotto, MBA and author of 22 Leadership Fundamentals. “Natural-born leaders are very rare. Leadership is something that we can learn with continuous improvement and keen self-awareness. The great thing about leadership is that you can build the skills.”
Even great leaders make mistakes
5 leaders share their biggest mistakes – and how they fixed them

Suzi Dafnis, Community Director and CEO, Australian Businesswomen’s Network

“I expected staff to be mind-readers. Of course they should know exactly how I wanted something to be done. After enough evidence that short/sharp verbal instructions didn’t get the result, we developed written procedures and built in more training for new recruits.”

Glen Carlson, Director, Key Person of Influence

“The biggest mistake I ever made was taking on somebody else’s leadership style. One of my heroes is Steve Jobs and I’d read a lot about him being really intense with people, berating them. There was a period in the first few years of my business, where it was growing really fast, and I almost intentionally took on this abrasive and strong leadership persona, thinking that was good leadership because it worked for Jobs. But a good mate of mine pulled me up and said, ‘this doesn’t feel like Glen – the team is freaked out, scared by you. So I checked in with them, and it clicked. I was being a jerk. So I came back to Glen-style leadership – which is inclusive.’"
Emma Isaacs, CEO, Business Chicks

“There are many times when I should have had conversations with people and told them what I wanted or that my needs weren’t being met, but I left it as I didn’t want to rock the boat. The strength of a leader can be measured in having the difficult conversations, and I still don’t always get this right.”

Michael J. Connell, Director Human Resources, APAC

“Not listening. It is the key to building strong and trusted relationships. [I was] getting the team to brainstorm ideas when I knew what I wanted to implement or change. They spent a lot of time on this and I just implemented my idea. This caused a lot of disengagement in the team.”

Alison Vidotto, MBA and author of 22 Leadership Fundamentals

“Like most successful leaders I have made a number of mistakes along the way. Not believing in myself as a leader would be high up there. I have deferred to others because I thought they knew more than me or they spoke with such confidence and persuasion. There was a time that I thought leadership was connected to the position you held or the number of followers you had.”
They’re predictable.

“Your team must never be left guessing about how you’re going to react to something,” says Emma Isaacs, CEO, Business Chicks. “You must be predictable and stable in all your dealings and, above all, show a level of integrity and honesty always.”

They have presence.

“By presence, I mean the ability to stay on track even when things get hairy,” says Suzi Dafnis, Community Director and CEO, Australian Businesswomen’s Network. “As the leader, your ability to ‘keep your eye on the prize’ and to deal with constraints, includes being able to be present enough to sense when things are off track – and to be calm enough to respond appropriately when the time comes.”

They’re happy not to be the smartest person in the room.

“Instead of trying to be the expert, they create the space for success to happen,” says Glen Carlson, Director, Key Person of Influence. “They get smart people in the room because they understand they can’t do it alone. Leadership thinking is not thinking that you need to do it yourself.”
They create meaning in an organisation.

“They are the holder and the keeper of the purpose,” says Stephen Shepherd, Director, Altus Q. “By purpose I mean ‘why do we do what we do, why do we exist, where are we going and why does that matter’. They are the key bastion of the culture, and they live it and breathe it.”

They’re strong leaders, not bullies.

“A strong leader wants to get the best out of the individual members of a team and, in order to do that, they need to know what everyone’s capable of, how they need to encourage and develop each member of that team, and how they can take them with them,” says Meredith Fuller, psychologist and author of Working With Mean Girls. “It’s intentional leadership – you have a relationship that’s collaborative, but you know when the final decision rests with you... A bully, on the other hand, is someone who gets off on power and control, and isn’t in a relationship with their team members.”

They’re looking for answers from you.

“People often want answers rather than figuring things out for themselves,” says Michael J. Connell, Director Human Resources at APAC. “Good leaders will coach them to come up with their own answers and guide them to the right result.”

They lead inside-out.

“Great leaders understand that if they want change in an organisation, it comes from them and their leadership team first,” says Shepherd. “If there’s a change in pattern or belief, it fundamentally needs to come from them and their actions.”
A: In his article ‘Harnessing the power of thought leadership as a marketing strategy’, Trevor Young from Authority Partners writes that in the past thought leaders had their profiles and reputations fuelled by regular media coverage and public speaking engagements. While this remains critical for aspiring thought leaders today, he says it’s more important to have a consistent track record in publishing valuable and thought-provoking content – everywhere from blog posts, white papers, ebooks and podcasts, to social media channels, particularly Twitter and LinkedIn.

According to Young, while it might seem that the term ‘thought leader’ has reached buzzword proportions, it’s been around for a couple of decades, attributed to Joel Kurtzman, who was editor-in-chief of Booz & Company’s strategy + business magazine at the time.
But what exactly is a thought leader?

Young says: “Thought leadership – like authority, personal branding, reputation and expert status – can be a nebulous construct. What we’re talking about here are people’s perceptions. To me, a thought leader is someone who has strong knowledge of, and expertise in, a particular subject, topic or issue. But more than that, they have publicly and relentlessly demonstrated their bona fides over time by taking a stance, having a perspective, and voicing their views and opinions by publishing a high standard of relevant content across multiple channels, including public speaking.”

Young goes on to say that for individuals who approach thought leadership strategically, and execute with passion and purpose over the long term, “the rewards can be great.”

But what exactly is a thought leader?

According to Forbes, “A thought leader is an individual or firm that prospects, clients, referral sources, intermediaries and even competitors recognise as one of the foremost authorities in selected areas of specialisation, resulting in its being the go-to individual or organisation for said expertise.”

Could you become a thought leader in your area of speciality?
Resources:

http://meredithfuller.com.au
http://alisonvidotto.com/
http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=16558612

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”

Lao Tzu