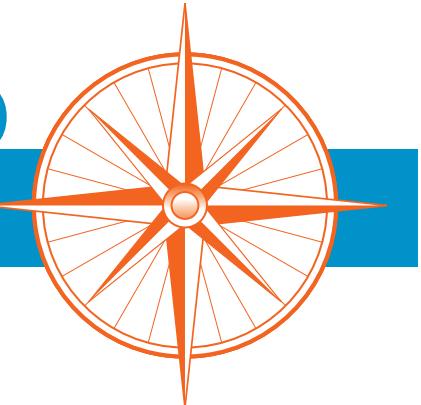


# 6 Leadership Lessons



*How can you become a better leader?*

by Kindra Gordon

Leadership is a buzzword today — from politics and business to communities and organizations, it seems great leaders are being sought. How can you become a better leader in your own business or the organizations you serve?

Here's a collection of lessons learned from a variety of authors, coaches and business greats.

## 1 Grow others

Respected business guru and former General Electric CEO Jack Welch has some sage — and simple — advice about being a better leader. Welch has stated: "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing *yourself*. When you become a leader, success is all about growing *others*."

## 2 Make people job 1

Amy Lyman, author of "The Trustworthy Leader," says, "If you want to be a successful leader, you need to devote all of your time to people issues.... Five minutes a day — or even five minutes an hour — is the wrong approach."

She continues, "The problem is we tend to separate our 'work' from the 'people' issues." Lyman makes the point that people are integral to our ability in every single area in our organizations, and if we do not include consideration of people in every aspect of our work, then we are doing ourselves and our organizations a great disservice.

The bottom line, says Lyman — no matter what industry you are in — is that "Our work is people."

## 3 Provide feedback

Leaders have a dual role: foremost is their job as a visionary, setting the future direction and plans for the business. But perhaps equally important, suggest many human resource and business experts, is the leader's role as a "motivator" and "inspiration" to the employees.

During the recent Cattle Industry Convention in Tampa, Fla., Clay Mathis, executive director of the King Ranch Institute, shared research that shows employees want to be part of the team, they want to understand the vision and mission of the business, they want to have a clear — written — description of their jobs, and they want feedback as to how they and the business are performing.

Mathis shared the example of UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who kept diaries and noted improvement of each player during practice. Wooden then shared that feedback with players at the end of each practice.

Mathis said, "This took 15-30 minutes extra, but it was important to Wooden as a coach and the results showed." Wooden and his team earned 10 NCAA titles.

Mathis added, "By this example there is certainly more room for feedback that's positive in

our industry." He noted that taking time to provide positive feedback with your employees could very well make your operation more productive.

## 4 Find your focus

We all have a million things on our "to-do" list, so how can you achieve more? Some recent tips in *Inc.* magazine suggest you actually should do less. *Inc.* columnist Minda Zetlin says you should prioritize the tasks that will best advance you toward your most important goals; then eliminate the bottom 20% of your to-do list — particularly if they don't align with your core priorities.

By focusing on the end goal that you want to achieve, the steps along the way to reach that objective become crystal clear — and top priority.

*Inc.* magazine columnist and software business owner Jason Fried described honing in on your focus as akin to pruning an apple tree. Fried notes that cutting things back is a way of favoring what is left; you help the tree flourish by picking the winners.

He adds that pruning opens up new opportunities. Light gets in where it couldn't before; air circulates better; and new growth appears. If you did your pruning right, you've given your tree (aka your business) a stronger foundation for the future — and you've given yourself the chance to analyze what's there, minimize

the distractions and possibly sprout some new ideas.

## 5 Have some fun

What keeps employees humming happily along in their jobs? You might be surprised to learn that if you give your employees a little longer leash — as in free time to work on their own ideas or projects related to the business — you will actually find that they are happier and more productive. This ultimately leads to a winning formula — happier employees translate to a more innovative and successful business.

Are you wondering if this approach really works? Google seems to think so. It was voted among the “best places to work” in 2013 and its 2011 sales boasted \$37.9 billion. Google encourages creativity — it even put rock climbing walls and giant slides in some of its corporate office complexes. In addition, Google offers “20% time,” where employees get to spend 20% of their workday working on projects they are passionate about. In fact, that’s how Gmail and Google News both got started.

Similarly, 3M has a policy called the 15% rule — where staff devote 15% of work hours to their own projects.

What might your employees come up with for “new” ideas to improve and innovate your business, company or organization if they were given some time to devote to them? And what would result if they were actually asked to share their input?

Given that Americans on average spend more than 2,000 hours a year at work, infusing a little fun into the process certainly can’t hurt — and it just might build a stronger, more resilient team.

Companies like LinkedIn, Zappos and Google also promote on-the-job game time for activities like ping-pong or foosball.

While these activities may seem completely unrelated to work, they are very powerful at building working relationships. Many company executives agree that employees who play together, stay together and work hard together.

All this talk about free time and fun time, isn’t just for the employees. If you are a manager or boss who is working round the clock, a Harvard business school professor has some advice for you: Take a night — or day — off.

That’s right; Leslie Perlow, author of “Sleeping With Your Smartphone,” conducted research with executives who worked more than 65 hours a week (not counting some 20 hours spent monitoring their smartphones). She wanted to see what would happen if they took a full night off per week.

The result: Productivity did not drop; instead it increased. Perlow attributes this improvement to the fact that they were forced to plan, prioritize and coordinate better in the work time they did have — and they had some personal

downtime for themselves, which allowed them to recharge and return to work focused.

## 6 Motivate your brain

Another tool to enhance your innovative abilities is to surprise your brain every once in a while.

Research by neuroscientist Gregory Berns suggests the brain craves novelty — aka new and different things. But, Berns points out that most people work in the same place every day, which results in thinking in certain ways.

To break that monotony, Berns suggests shaking up your routine, traveling or doing things you haven’t done before — and stimulating your brain. The ideas that come forth to your same old problems just might surprise you. **HW**

## Speaking of failure

And what happens if you fail? Hopefully, you’ve heard the expression that “experience is the name we give to our mistakes.” Indeed, failure can be a wonderful teacher — if you allow yourself to really analyze what went wrong or what could have been done differently.

In a recent article about Arianna Huffington, co-founder and editor of the online *Huffington Post* news site, she pointed out, “There’s absolutely no one who’s succeeded who has not failed along the way.”

She added, “My mother used to call failure a stepping stone to success, as opposed to the opposite of success.”

Huffington also shared a story about Steve Jobs, who said being fired from Apple was the best thing that ever happened to him. He said, “The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything.”

To that Huffington notes that success often generates fear — and stops people because they are afraid to step out of their comfort zones and risk failure.

Don’t let that happen — forge ahead and take risks. Whether you succeed — or fail — you’ll learn from the experience. **HW**