

Picture of a true leader

By: Peter Leger

In an effort to pen my thoughts, I find myself wondering why it is that reducing the concept of 'Leadership' to a few words, a concise convincing paragraph, is just so difficult.

Humanity's abilities on the whole can be quite easily evaluated. Come up with a theory of relativity, the telephone or iPhone, a lunar landing – and the accomplishment is there for all to see. The pure genius of it is inescapable.

But with leadership, this is not often the case. To understand the extent of leadership, one has to unravel the fabric that holds things together. It isn't something that can happen in isolation and it lives at the touch points of people's lives.

In today's world of social media, the concept of leadership is probably more relevant than ever. It makes being a successful leader that much more difficult, as the landscape shifts and adapts far more quickly than ever before. You have to work on the assumption that almost everyone knows almost everything, or will do so in a short amount of time. And this is something that true leaders use to their own advantage.

Steve Jobs is a fine example of an individual who 'got it' – and as a result he showed a natural propensity for leadership. By remaining passionate and true to a few key beliefs, he catapulted himself and the Apple brand into cult status.

While trying to grasp what made him so remarkable is not simple and at the risk of doing his legend an injustice, I would like to highlight just a few of these key elements. Many more traits could be added to this list, and reflecting on three of these might help in trying to button down the key elements of leadership.

Firstly, Jobs lived with the reality that change is accelerating. It is accelerating to such an extent that consumers are not fully aware yet of what they want, and only realise it when they find a product that fulfils a need they are only peripherally aware they have. Similarly, he faced reality. When he got something wrong, he was the first to admit it. He was up to the task of publicly humiliating himself when he had headed off in the wrong direction.

Secondly, he knew how to think better. He could see the interdependence of things, how communities were so much stronger than their individuals, and how amplifying interdependence could cause consumers to increasingly depend on Apple to the exclusion of other products. He reduced noise and distraction by keeping Apple elements simple and aesthetically appealing.

Finally, he understood the need for urgency. His passion and urgency to create and get-to-market has resulted in records being set in global product roll-out. He wasn't afraid of the complexity and risk this brought and thought not about what could go wrong, but only 'what could go right'. As a result, Apple has changed the world as we know it: disrupting the world of music, mobile phones, software sales and portable computing in record time.

Jobs wasn't the archetypical leader – no towering height, deep voice and inspiring monologue that could lead minions into the fire. Yet he had a great grasp on reality. He could think better. And he supported these qualities with passion and urgency. By consistently showing he understood what people want and then giving them more, he touched millions and remarkably, elicited gratitude and rapport from his consumers, and many could even be called his followers. And is that not what a true leader does? ■



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