



## How to Be a Memorable Leader

By Jean Kelley

If you look back over your career, chances are you can identify one or two people who stand out as memorable leaders. Even if these people didn't hold an official leadership role, their actions and words rallied people together to achieve a common goal. And whether that goal was large or small, far reaching or contained, you remember these leaders for a long time.

While there are many great leaders in the world, not all of them are truly memorable—that is, they don't leave an impression that lasts beyond their current accomplishment or focus. But being memorable is essential if you want long-term success. So what makes one leader memorable and puts another in the “out of sight, out of mind” category? It comes down to three key elements. Develop these characteristics in yourself and you, too, can be a memorable leader.

### Know Who You Are

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” While that's a little harsh, it does make the point that everyone must examine their life. For what? To pinpoint your “moral compass”—your true values. Memorable leaders know their values, why those values are important, and how those values play out in life.

Realize that you can't have one set of values in your work life and a different set in your personal life. You take your set of values with you everywhere, and a mess up in one area of life can easily affect another. For example, it was a seemingly personal value that distracted and somewhat derailed Bill Clinton's career, not a business value, which shows that values are not compartmentalized. So if you don't examine your life and know what you stand for, you can easily get sidetracked.

Getting to know yourself starts with honesty—with others and yourself. While most people have “cash register” honesty, meaning they'd never steal money from their employer, they aren't always honest in other ways. Perhaps they tell the world they value one thing, yet display something else. For example, some people will tout the value of hard work and claim they work harder than anyone else. Yet when you really look at their work behaviors, you find that they're spending most of the day on long conversations that have little to do with work or are surfing the Internet—things that don't advance the company. That's not personal honesty or personal awareness.

If you're having trouble knowing who you are and what you stand for, ask a trusted colleague or family member to give you feedback. You can also opt to do a formal 360-degree feedback assessment, which enables others to give objective insight on how they view you.

### Know Your Vision, Communicate It, and Live It

A Harvard Business School professor once said, “The only thing a CEO needs to do is communicate their vision, communicate their vision, and then communicate their vision.” Why is communicating the vision so important? Because if you don't know where you're going and tell others where you're going, then you and everyone around you are going to lose the way. With all the things employees have going on in their lives, they're distracted during some of the week, so

it's easy for them to get off track. Memorable leaders keep communicating the vision so everyone is always on the same page.

Living your vision and your company's core values means everyone—those you report to and those who report to you—knows the vision as well. If you don't understand your company's vision or core values, have a conversation with your boss about them. Without vision and values, both companies and people lose their way—people are floundering, no one knows what they should be doing, and people hide their potential talent. Not a good situation for sure! For example, in a manufacturing company, getting the product out on time isn't a core value and has nothing to do with the company's vision. In order to have a healthy and synergistic team, people need to connect to something bigger than a goal of moving product. Vision and values make the difference.

Also realize that communicating a vision does not mean the leader needs to be talkative. Many memorable leaders are quiet and reserved, such as presidents Truman and Eisenhower. People follow memorable leaders because they exemplify their vision, not just tout it.

### **Be Teachable**

Being open to learning new things and admitting your limitations and your struggles give you power; it's not a weakness. Realize that people don't want to think they're following a robot. They want to know that whoever they're following is real.

Memorable leaders teach other leaders and are interested in the development of people beneath them. That's why you need to be in touch with your direct reports and learn their dreams, goals, and career aspirations. As the old quote says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." So the "teachable" part goes in two directions: you have to be willing to learn for yourself and you have to be willing to teach others.

Finally, Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, once said, "Leaders are readers." That means it's important you know what's going on in all industries, not just your own. Staying too focused on one viewpoint of issues makes you one-dimensional. Creativity comes from combining what you know with what other leaders know and then adapting it to your own industry in order to improve or innovate. That's why "overview" publications like *Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes*, and *Inc.* are favorites of memorable leaders.

### **A Leader for the Ages**

While few people are natural born leaders, you can learn to be a memorable leader and have people lining up, asking to work for you. All it takes is a commitment to lead others in a way that reflects your deepest held values, embraces your vision, and encourages lifelong learning. The more you commit to practicing and living these three keys, the more memorable you'll be.

### **About the Author**

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