

How to Stop Managing and Start Leading

Transform a good business into an extraordinary business

BY LESLIE CUNNINGHAM

ASA YOUNG GIRL, I was fascinated with why some people had amazing lives and why others failed.

Nearly 10 years ago when I began coaching entrepreneurs and business owners, I became intrigued by what distinguished a good business from an extraordinary business. In both growing my own business and coaching my clients, I've learned the secret lies in transforming yourself from manager to leader.

Your business is either growing or dying; you can't stay in one place. Building a successful business and team is about evolving. You're either progressing and expanding, or stalling and contracting. This includes being a leader that focuses on the important things — even in the midst of your busy season.

THEY ARE COMMITTED TO A VISION

Leaders inspire others. They spend time working on their business instead of just working in their business, and they are willing to embody their vision.

John Yokoyama, the owner of the world famous Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, appeared on my weekly Business Leadership radio show. People come from all over the world to watch the fishmongers at the Pike Place Fish Market as they toss fish to each other. They are drawn there because the fishmongers have created a playful, boisterous environment.

When you enter, you are instantly greeted by the market's energy. I asked Yokoyama how he supports his crew and creates such a lively and engaging workplace.

"Each crew member has made a commitment to making a world-famous difference to each and every customer who walks through the door," he says. "As the owner, I have made a commitment to making a world-famous difference to each and every one of my employees. See, many businesses look at the success we've created and are eager to study how we've done that. They think it's all about choosing our attitude, having fun, playing and making our customers' day. But the way we consciously choose to show up for our customers occurs as a natural result of the commitment to living our vision."

The Pike Place Fish Market expresses and lives by a higher vision and purpose no different than the visions of Gandhi, Martin Luther King or even Kennedy when he declared we would put a man on the moon within a decade. A clear vision creates a clear end-game and inspires us to move from where we are now to where we want to be.

THEY ARE CONNECTED TO A HIGHER PURPOSE

While powerful business leaders certainly want to make money and build successful businesses, they are also connected with a bigger purpose.

When I started as a business consultant, my primary concern was to make money and pay the family bills. However, I quickly discovered this was a narrow focus — and it kept me operating at a "surviving and getting by" level in my business. When I connected with a bigger purpose in my business — which for me is to empower business owners and leaders — I connected with a deeper passion, conviction and purpose. That inspired me to move past my fears. And interestingly enough, I made a lot more money. But it wasn't about money; it was about making a difference for others.

When a business or individual strives to make a difference in the world, they are called to show up in an entirely different way — a way that makes a significant and meaningful impact on customers and communities. Something that has you jumping out of bed and excited to get to work. Once you and your staff commit to that purpose, recommit to living your vision every day.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl chronicles his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. In the opening of his book, he writes:

"Don't aim at success — the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued: it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself."

THEY HAVE A DEEP CONVICTION TO SUCCEED

Regardless of how long it takes, these leaders hold a deep conviction that they will succeed in the end. They are

tenacious. They don't just give up after a short amount of time.

In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes The Stockdale Paradox. Admiral James Stockdale was the highest-ranking U.S. military officer at the height of the Vietnam War. He was tortured over 20 times during his eight years at a prison camp. When he was asked how he made it through, he said, "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life."

Jim Collins and his team recognized this was one of the defining principles of good to great companies. Collins writes how Stockdale shared with him that "you must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality whatever they might be."

In other words, be willing to face the hard facts and deal with your current reality head on, learn from your results and move forward. And regardless of last year's results, or your track record over the last five, 10 or even 20 years, take on the mind-set that you will prevail in the end.

THEY ALLOW THE FUTURE TO SHAPE THEIR ACTIONS

Powerful leaders take action for the future instead of allowing the past to hold them back. Most of us take action based on our limited beliefs and perspectives in our business. For example, if you had a poor first quarter, it's easy to feel discouraged. However, a powerful leader keeps recommitting to his or her vision, and they begin to succeed one step at a time.

The only thing we can say that is the truth about the future is that it is unknown. And therefore it exists as pure possibility. Instead of working from their past, extraordinary leaders work backwards from their vision to create the future they desire.

THEY KEEP A GOOD PERSPECTIVE

Powerful leaders don't allow their desire to be liked to outweigh their commitment to be of service. There is a fantastic scene in the Nelson Mandela documentary *A Long Walk to Freedom* where he makes a public appearance

shortly after being released from 27 years of prison. "You have trusted me to be your leader and as your leader, it is my responsibility to tell you that you are wrong," Mandela says in one of his speeches. "We must forgive the British. We must put an end to this fighting."

Mandela knew many would be resistant to and angered by his message. But he was willing to say what needed to be said. He held a bigger commitment to be of service to others and his vision of peace rather than being liked. When we're more concerned about being liked and accepted, we sabotage our ability to be an effective leader.

THEY EMPOWER OTHERS

Leaders are willing to have direct, straight conversations with others. If something isn't working with a team member, they address it head on. Instead of being negative, blaming or complaining, they are supportive and offer empowering feedback with the intention of making a difference. They are committed to each and every team member's growth. If they keep their mouth shut and don't offer feedback, not only does their team member not learn and grow, but it also sabotages the business and their ability to generate revenue.

THEY FIND OTHERS WHO FIT THE COMPANY CULTURE

They hire based on cultural fit, values and skills. They replace themselves with someone else so they can focus on leading and *working on their business instead of in their business*.

Eight years ago, I hired my first team member for my business. I was certain I couldn't afford it. I knew how to do everything myself, so why should I hire someone else to do it? But I knew I had to remove myself from dealing with the details of my business if I was going to be a powerful leader and visionary.

I hear owners and leaders saying things like, *It's easier to just do it myself. It takes less time if I do it myself. I don't trust my team, so I end up doing it myself. No one else will do it, so I just do it myself*. It's hard to carve out time to be a leader when you are busy being a worker.

Extraordinary leaders surround themselves with people who are smarter and more competent than they are. Having a successful business and awesome life doesn't mean *doing it all*, but it means *having it all*. By having great people and real leaders around you, you empower them to lead so you don't have to do everything yourself.



Leslie Cunningham is the founder of Impact & Profits, a coaching and consulting business that empowers business owners, managers and leaders to inspire extraordinary teamwork and breakthrough results with their team. Contact her at leslie@impactandprofits.com, impactandprofits.com.