

A VIEW FROM JOSH KRICHEFSKI

Understanding leadership – what is the formula for a great leader?

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Throughout my career I've been lucky enough to meet and work with some incredible leaders. From colleagues and clients, to partners and contacts I've met through my workplace, charities or other walks of life – these people have made a lasting impression.

Like anyone in business, at any level, I have areas I need and want to work on. And I've learned a lot by looking at how, by having the right attitude and strategies in place, great leaders have been made. When you witness a great leader in action, whether that is a CEO or someone in junior leadership, you owe it to yourself and your teams to learn from those traits and adopt some of their principles.

I don't think anyone – at any level – should ever stop that learning process. Right now, as I move into the EMEA CEO role at MediaCom, I am faced with a completely new challenge that will call for a different way of working than I've previously been used to.

And it's at these moments I try to think back to what I've seen from others and use them in my own life and career.

Some leaders I admire, and why I admire them

As people grow in seniority, manage different generations, take control in a new market or the world around us shifts, the characteristics needed in a leader change.

For example, when you look at the cultural and social changes we've all experienced in the last few years, the old-fashioned stoic image that leaders used to have to portray doesn't really fit anymore. Now, authenticity and empathy are absolutely fundamental character traits.

You need only look at the admiration and popularity of leaders as far-ranging as Jacinda Ardern, Gareth Southgate, Ariana Huffington and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to see the evolution that's happened – and is still ongoing.

But if I were to land on three principles which I admire in the leaders around me now, I believe they are...

1. **Respect and humility** – we're living in a divided world. Politically, economically and socially, the world doesn't feel united and I think in that environment, it's so important to treat people with respect. This is no different in leadership – no matter what you're leading. Having and giving an opinion is important, but more so is the ability to listen to and genuinely consider the views of others. Doing that can provide insights you'd have otherwise missed or inspire ideas. Equally, if the opinions you're hearing seem negative, we need to be brave and use that to inform decision making, be aware of the arguments that may be leveled at us and have the answers.

A leader who encapsulates this is Barack Obama. I believe he's one of the most intelligent people in the world, but this is underplayed because he is so understated. He is humble, thoughtful, considered and remains calm under pressure. He was clearly very respectful to his staff, regardless of level. In fact, somebody once told me that Obama (and George W. Bush actually) would never start a meeting by giving their opinion. Instead they would almost always start with a question to the most junior person in the room. That sums it up really – being a “leader” gives us a platform, but sometimes we should shut up and let others talk.

2. **Authenticity and a people-led approach** – that a leader cares about and understands the team they're leading should be a given. Sadly, it's not. Many remain distant or detached from the realities of the business and the people pouring their heart and soul into it every day. It's so important we move away from this. We spend a huge portion of our lives in work, which means we have a responsibility to make sure our teams are happy and healthy in and around the workplace. Part of that is being honest and open about who we are – as leaders and just as people.

I look at some like Liverpool's manager Jurgen Klopp and think “that's how to be”. He is the archetypal people-manager, with that ability to get the very best out of the players in his team through a strong understanding of each player. He appreciates that each of them is different from the other and treats them accordingly. He exudes respect, love for his team and he wears his heart on his sleeve. He personifies authentic leadership. Everybody who knows him says there is not another side to Klopp. He is exactly how he presents himself. Truly inspirational.

3. **Focus and determination** – alongside the more people-led skills I admire in great leaders, there's a lot to be said for clear focus and determination. A leader who is respected and liked by his people is a brilliant thing, but they need to be aiming for something. Whether winning the Premier League, being elected to government, or delivering world-changing products or services... whatever the objective, great leaders get buy-in from those around them and get people excited about the future.

A modern leader to look to for this is Tesco's CEO Dave Lewis. He surrounds himself with good people but also has a laser sharp vision for what he wants. Retail – and particularly grocery – has undergone huge transformation since he took over in 2014. Much of that, whether improved apps and digital services, to clearer labelling and packaging, has been driven by Tesco. Dave had his vision for Tesco's future, and he focused on bringing everyone along with him. He is also a leader who still gets his hands dirty and has his arms around the business.

Summing up “great leadership” in words isn't possible really. But I think reflecting on and considering what it means to you is important.

Whether we're talking about a leader, or someone looking to be one in future, the ability to listen to the people you're interacting with, or just watch and learn from afar, is key. I'm learning from the people around me every day and I can promise you I'll be stealing a few of their approaches at some point in future.

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