

6 STEPS TO POWERFUL LEADERSHIP

What You Don't Learn in a TRADITIONAL MANAGEMENT SCHOOL



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In traditional management schools, leadership is often defined by structured principles. You're taught that leadership involves setting strategic goals, increasing shareholder value and ensuring organisational success through efficient processes.

While these fundamentals are important, leadership in today's highly customer-centric world needs to go much further than what's outlined in textbooks. It's about resonating with your team, embodying your values, and driving meaningful change. So, let me walk you through how to take your leadership to the next level.

Becoming a TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER

Leadership, to me, isn't just about managing people or overseeing projects. It's about being a change agent, which is probably best described by **John Quincy Adams** when he said: *"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."*

The key to becoming this type of leader lies not in memorising academic frameworks, but in understanding the qualities that can truly inspire people to follow you. So, how do you build this kind of leadership?

A person wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white shirt, and a blue and white striped tie is shown from the chest down. They are stacking light-colored wooden blocks on a wooden surface to form a staircase that ascends from left to right. The person's hands are visible, holding the blocks in place.

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- John Quincy Adams



STEP 1:

Setting Direction That Resonates

The first step to becoming a great leader is setting a direction that resonates with people. What does this mean? It's about connecting to something deeper than just the surface-level goals of increasing profits or improving KPIs.

Let's be honest — how many of your staff members wake up excited to increase shareholder value? Very few — and that's at a very high level as well. Most engaged employees focus on what they can do today to make a difference or how they can go above and beyond to deliver exceptional results.

Given this, as a leader when you shift the conversation with your staff to how your organisation is making a real difference in transforming customers' lives, creating innovations or building

something that matters, you create an emotional connection that energises people. Resonance is like striking the perfect note on a tuning fork. It vibrates deeply with the hearts and minds of your team, aligning their personal values with the mission of the organisation.

For example, rather than saying, *“Our goal is to hit X% profit margins this quarter,”* spin it around to say: *“Our mission is to improve 1 million of our customers' lives by solving this challenge that they are facing every other day.”* That's something people can get behind.

One of the biggest drivers of employee engagement is a clear line of sight where staff know how what they do contributes to the bigger picture.



STEP 2:

Living Dynamic Values that help you achieve your Vision & Mission

A Vision statement is an ‘I see’ statement that is developed individually by the leader. It is aspirational in nature that encourages the team to work together to achieve an exciting future.

In comparison, a Mission statement is a ‘We’ statement created by the leadership team that clearly articulates what the team, or ‘We’ will do to achieve the Vision.

Once you have set a direction, you need to establish values that will help you achieve your direction. Values are what an organisation should ‘value’ and truly stand for. It is not enough to simply hang a poster of your company’s values on the wall.

Your team will naturally follow your lead, so it is vital that your actions reflect these Values.

I always advise my clients to link prescribed behaviours to each value, so that everybody knows what it means to truly embody them.

A big part of living your values is understanding what type of values you have.

Are they hygiene factors like integrity and respect, which are the bare minimum for any functioning workplace?

Or are they aspirational values like customer obsession and innovation, which push your organisation to excel and evolve?

I personally know of a business leader who would not wish to be named. She would walk around the floor every week and ask her staff, **“What have you done in the last week to progress our mission?”** This simple question kept everyone accountable, turning the mission into more than just words.

When a leader remains focused on translating words into action, the entire organisation follows suit, and it shows in the everyday behaviour of each team member.

STEP 3:

Trust is a Two-Way Street



Trust is a cornerstone of leadership, yet it's something you won't find in a typical management textbook. To lead effectively, you must first earn Trust, but it doesn't stop there. Trust is a two-way street, built on the pillars of both competence and character.

Competence ensures that you know your craft, enabling you to steer your team with confidence. Character speaks to your integrity—are you honest, transparent, and truly invested in the well-being of your team? These qualities shape how your team views you and whether they trust your leadership.

But Trust must also flow both ways. If you don't Trust your team, they won't Trust you either. This is because they are aware of their own capabilities and will not follow a leader that undermines them

People respond to how they are treated—if you doubt their abilities, you weaken their Trust in your leadership. To cultivate a team that trusts and follows you, it's essential to first show them that you trust in their capabilities.



STEP 4:

Influencing Skills based on Core Human Needs



To be an effective leader, you must also be able to influence your team. But here's the catch—you can't influence someone until you first understand what already influences them. This is where the knowledge of understanding the six core human needs comes into play, which I have discussed extensively in my previous article titled *“Unlocking Loyalty, Engagement, and High Performance in Your Business”* (Ed. September 2024). Every individual has core needs - whether it's Certainty, Variety, Significance, Connection, Growth or Contribution. If you understand what drives someone, you can connect with them in a way that compels them to take positive action.

It's not enough to shout orders from the top. You need to meet people where they are and align your organisation's goals with their personal motivations.





STEP 5:

Empathy as a Key Leadership Trait

Empathy is one of the most undervalued traits in leadership, yet it is the most essential. I have seen too many leaders sit comfortably in their head offices, making decisions for frontline employees

without ever truly understanding the day-to-day challenges those employees face. The best leaders take the time to experience what it's like on the front lines. They understand their team's struggles, listen to their feedback, and incorporate that understanding into their leadership.

In some of my biggest successes in terms of organisational transformation including brand rejuvenation, customer centricity and needs based cross-sell a key success component has been to take the top executive and encourage them to spend time with the front line staff and customers.

Napoleon Bonaparte is often cited as a great general because he understood how to leverage cannons—then a revolutionary technology. Why? Because he had firsthand experience with them in the field. He didn't lead from a distance; he knew the details because he had been in the trenches.

In the same way, great leaders today need to get out of their ivory towers and connect with the people doing the work. Let's look at a few modern-day examples as well for better inspiration.

Brewing Success with Empathy at Starbucks

Howard Schultz, the former CEO of Starbucks, is said to have often visited Starbucks stores around the world, speaking to baristas and learning about their experiences. This hands-on approach helped him better understand the operational challenges on the ground. His empathy allowed him to create policies that improved working conditions for employees, such as offering healthcare benefits to part-time workers, which, in turn, led to a more motivated and loyal workforce.

Driving Ford's Turnaround with Hands-On Leadership

Another striking example is Alan Mulally, the former CEO of Ford. When Mulally took over Ford during a difficult financial period, he didn't just rely on reports from his executives. He spent time on the factory floor, talking to workers and understanding the challenges they faced in producing vehicles. This allowed him to make decisions that were not only financially sound but also empathetic to the employees who had been struggling to keep up with demand and quality expectations.

Leaders like these recognise that empathy is not about being soft or lenient. It's about gaining a real understanding of what your team goes through. When leaders show they are willing to walk in their employees' shoes, they earn respect, trust, and the loyalty needed to drive their organisations forward. It's not just about connecting emotionally; it's about making informed decisions that take the human aspect into account.



STEP 6:

Being the Best Version of Yourself

BUT...

before you can lead others effectively, you need to be the best version of yourself. It's like the safety instructions on an airplane: put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others. If you are not operating at your highest level, you cannot expect to inspire your team to achieve their best.

This involves focusing on measures that help you step up and become the best version of yourself. These include a disciplined practice of:

1. Crafting empowering beliefs.
2. Asking the right questions.
3. Having an accountability mindset as opposed to playing the blame game.
4. A clear focus on the goal.
5. Being persistent in the face of adversity.

Leaders don't give up after a setback; they learn from it. Successful leaders know that failure is just part of the journey to success and have auto-programs to deal with adversity. They don't whinge about "**Why did this happen to me?**". Rather, they ask themselves, "**What can I learn from this?**" or "**What else could this mean?**" These questions allow them to respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively.

This helps them find answers or clues towards a larger problem that is pulsing with the need for resolution. Once a Leader recognises this need, they need to become persistent in finding that solution that drives meaningful change. It involves more than just mastering technical skills or following a strategic plan.

And this is what inspires others to become followers and together create a force that makes a real impact.

Leadership isn't just a role—it's a powerful opportunity to shape the future, inspire change, and leave a lasting legacy. True leaders don't simply manage; they uplift those around them, fostering an environment where trust, innovation, and empowerment are the norm. Every decision and action is a chance to inspire others, challenge the status quo, and drive real progress.

Are you leading in a way that leaves a lasting impact? At Engaged Strategy, we help leaders unlock their full potential and drive transformative change. Reach out to discover how we can support your leadership journey.