



On Leadership

by Dana Theus



Over the years working with executive teams I've developed a few "good advice" themes for non-profit and commercial clients alike. Here are my three pieces of advice for leaders:

1. Lead Towards a *Vision Impossible*
2. Try to Put Yourself Out of Business
3. Be the Best of Who You Are

Lead Towards a Vision Impossible

One of the fine arts of leadership is motivating and inspiring people to go above and beyond - to provide greater quality service, to think more creatively than the competition, to be more productive - in short, to give more of themselves to your cause. This is easier said than done, of course, but motivating them absolutely starts with a shared vision of a future made better as a result of *their* efforts. Even the most jaded employee or volunteer wants to make a difference as long as they believe it's possible. So why Vision "Impossible" leadership? The impossible vision is the "we will go to the moon not because it is easy but because it is hard" (JFK) technique that activates desires so powerful that they motivate people into finding their way around the why-nots that busy people surround themselves with to get the job done (such as the "we don't have the resources why-not" that zaps better mousetrap ideas right and left.) Vision Impossible leadership also motivates people with a solid End Goal plan to move closer to that seemingly impossible future, but without inspirational direction to start with, where do you think you're going? (This is a big subject. [Read more.](#))

Try to Put Yourself Out of Business

Ok not literally, but figuratively great leaders know that change is inevitable and that it's just a matter of time before "the next big thing" comes along to challenge the success of their current model. So if you're going to face annihilation from a better mousetrap eventually, why not be the one to invent the newfangled thing in the first place? Think of it as a twist on planned obsolescence and the key is the word "planned." If you are your own worst competitive threat, you have a better chance of managing the transition from one business model to the next, or one technology base to the next, or one market to the next. Bill Gates demonstrated this in the mid '90's when Microsoft went from proactively ignoring the Internet to accepting its inevitability through an '[embrace and extend](#)' strategy, to dominating it (briefly) through the release of Internet Explorer. Google is now the one to beat, but don't count Microsoft out yet.

To successfully compete with yourself takes courage because change always involves discomfort, and you certainly risk accidentally weakening a strong organization by moving into the future before your stakeholders are ready to go there with you. But I offer this up as a leadership philosophy more than a specific tactic because if you're *looking* for opportunities to put yourself out of business you will be thinking more like your competition and thus be more likely to see opportunities to serve your stakeholders better and in new ways before it's too late.

Be the Best of Who You Are

There was a time not so long ago when the image of your organization was supposed to be a finely crafted thing, a precise set of visual and messaging impressions that equated to your 'brand'. Well, brand is as relevant as it ever was, and still results from visual and messaging impressions you leave behind as you go about your business, but thanks to [social media](#) the market now demands that your brand and identity be 'authentic', more genuine and personal. The finely crafted image has become suspect due to its perception of craftiness.

Great leaders welcome this transition to more open communication about their organization and use it as an opportunity not only to tell their story more personally, but to *build a better organization*. By this I don't mean to change who you are, but to allow the public light to shine on your organization and encourage you to rise to your most worthy potential. Great leaders are not afraid to hold themselves and the organizations they lead to the highest standards; they welcome every opportunity to do so. More and more your stakeholders will reward you when you succeed.