

Follow The Leader

If you are in a leadership role, it does matter what people think of you because reputation is essential to getting things done. In reality, successful leaders accomplish very little by themselves, rather, they bring others together for a common purpose. How others perceive the leader is important to encouraging followership.

In a recent Washington Post article, John Baldoni, a leadership consultant, coach, and author suggests that followership, which is based upon trust, is a reciprocal act. People follow the leader because they share similar values. A leader's reputation therefore is critical to creating trust, and in turn getting people to work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

How a leader nurtures their reputation is important to creating followership. Reputation is the sum of what a leader accomplishes and how they do it. Another term, used for reputation, that has gained in popularity, but dates back to Tom Peters first coining the phrase in 1997, is personal brand. Savvy executives know that brand is more than a product or service; it is the sum of how and why you connect with consumers and what they think of you.

The same principle applies to leaders. When building a reputation or personal brand, one must consider how their actions affect others. Leaders are judged by their accomplishments, but those achievements only occur when others believe in the leader. As with followership, a successful leader's brand relies upon reciprocity. Baldoni offers several simple suggestions on how to nurture a strong leadership brand.

Communicate by example. What a leader says is important, but what a leader does is even more important. People are more likely to follow a leader who follows through on what he promises and lives with the consequences. Failure to meet a deadline isn't necessarily a failure of leadership. Failure to set the right example is.

Have the strength of your convictions. The true mark of a leader is what they do when the going gets tough. Acting in the name of expediency can be the kiss of death. A decision is a leadership choice and good leaders are ones that stand up for what they believe.

Exude confidence. Leaders need to give people a reason to believe in themselves. Good leaders see the possibilities of what lies ahead and are able to bring others along to see it too. Demonstrating confidence to make good things happen is fundamental to leadership. This does not mean the future will unfold as planned, but, it does mean that leaders see the bigger picture and work to make things better.

A leader's brand radiates throughout the organization but it also carries to the outside world. When the CEO is respected, it casts a halo of excellence around the organization. The prime example of this is Steve Jobs at Apple; his vision is Apple's mission.

When it comes to reputation, how you do sometimes matters more than what you do. A leader's ability to get things done right will depend upon treating people right. What a leader does is rooted in mission; how a leader does it shapes his legacy.