

Activate Your Entrepreneurial Leadership

Martin Zwilling is a veteran startup mentor, executive, author, and angel investor who has often stated that creating and building a business is not a one-man show, even though it usually springs from the mind and determination of one person. But taking an idea to a business success requires many people to work together effectively, and that requires entrepreneurial leadership.

Leadership is not a skill one is born with, but it can be learned and honed from experience and failures. He cites six avenues of learning for new entrepreneurs to activate their leadership skills that are included in a new book, "The Leader's Checklist," by Michael Useem, the Director of the Wharton School's Center for Leadership and Change Management.

1. **Study leadership moments.** A first step is to become a self-directed student of leadership. This study can take many forms: reading leaders' biographies, witnessing leaders in action, and joining leadership development programs. What's critical is witnessing how others have worked with a full checklist or fallen short, often a powerful reminder to examine whether you are employing all the necessary principles.
2. **Solicit coaching and mentoring.** Solicit personal feedback from individuals who can provide informed, fine-grained advice on not only the leadership capacities that you already exhibit but those that require better display. It is hard to correct what you don't know you are not doing.
3. **Accept stretch experiences.** Ask for and accept new responsibilities outside your comfort zone. By testing fresh territories and experiencing the setbacks they can bring, you can grow to appreciate the shortfalls in your own leadership style even as you learn to more consistently apply it.
4. **Conduct after-action reviews of personal leadership moments.** Look back on leadership actions just taken, asking what worked, what was not invoked, and even what was missing from the original checklist. Through such efforts, entrepreneurs who actively pursue feedback from their team and their customers are on the road to success.
5. **Endure extremely stressful leadership moments.** Transform a difficult experience into a learning opportunity. We often learn as much from setbacks as successes—sometimes we learn even more from setbacks than successes—and with unflinching study of the stumbles, you have a greater readiness to apply real leadership the next time.
6. **Experience the leadership moments of others.** Try to vicariously or directly experience a leadership moment of a mentor or peer. When you walk in another's shoes during a critical test of leadership, you will build a better appreciation for when and how to invoke your own leadership elements.

The core principles of leadership for every entrepreneur include articulating a vision, thinking and acting strategically, acting decisively, communicating persuasively, motivating the team, building relationships, and building leadership in others. Of course, these need to be customized for every culture and every business environment. In every environment, there is a final and most vital leadership principle – common purpose comes first and personal self-interest comes last.