5 Habits Shared by the Most Successful Leaders

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Across a wide array of industries and geographies, the world's greatest business leaders know all goals must be rooted in consistent habits that support them. Top leaders regularly evaluate and reassess whether their daily practices are enabling them to lead effectively and efficiently, and ultimately, whether they are paving the path for their long-term plans.

Understanding that success often comes through incremental progress over time, they are confident that even when goals don't materialize as quickly as planned, the systems and processes they have put in place will keep their team motivated, energized and on track. The best leaders delight in their habits, knowing the hard work will ultimately lead to results.

After three decades of working with CEOs, I've come to find the following five fundamental habits are shared by the most successful leaders:

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1. Be disciplined with communication

Great leaders prioritize keeping consistent lines of communication by maintaining a regular cadence of one-to-ones and department meetings. They keep meetings productive and

results-oriented by leveraging some combination of the following best practices:

- **Share a brief with all participants ahead of every meeting:** This allows everyone to come ready to share relevant updates, answer questions, and offer fresh thinking and well-thought-out solutions, rather than spending the first part of the meeting getting everyone up to speed.
- **Open meetings by outlining the purpose and intended outcome:** This helps to set the tone, align expectations, ensure the conversation doesn't get sidetracked, and eliminate surprises.
- **Come to meetings prepared and ready to lead:** A great way to accomplish this is to create a 15-minute buffer between meetings. Avoiding back-to-back meetings gives leaders a quick opportunity to debrief from their previous meeting and prepare for their next.

2. Make planning programmatic

Rather than spending all day reacting to emergencies, effective CEOs take proactive control of their planning process. They routinely build planning checkpoints into their day: In the morning to set themselves up for the day, mid-day for reflection on critical projects, and in the evening to plan for the following day. This strategic and forward-thinking approach to planning gives leaders an opportunity to be thoughtful in their responses rather than constantly responding on the fly.

3. Master your calendar

Great leaders don't leave their priorities up to chance – they bake them directly into their calendars. Instead of simply

creating a to-do list and hoping they'll get through it by the end of the day, they set aside specific blocks of time for each item they want to accomplish, even if it's as simple as walking around the office to connect with the team.

This principle applies to both personal goals, like exercise, and business priorities, like strategic planning. An effective CEO's schedule often appears to be booked solid, but instead is carefully tailored to ensure important projects don't fall to the wayside. Some CEOs find success from digital planners or apps to super-schedule their day. Regardless of what tool is used, the practice of scheduling time for priorities is key to staying on track and making progress against goals.

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4. Create an accountability system with peers

Great CEOs know the pitfalls of trying to do everything on their own. They actively seek diverse perspectives from trusted peers to ensure their decision-making process is well-balanced. Remaining open-minded to new approaches, they welcome the expertise and counsel of others. Many have discovered that when they say their goals out loud to peers, they're more likely to follow through with action to support those goals. Whether it's in the form of a peer networking group, mentoring/coaching program or regular conversations with longtime friends, effective leaders lean into the value of community.

5. Carve out time for learning

Among the many pressing decisions CEOs need to make each day, it can be difficult to find time for learning. However, the world's best leaders regularly seek out new industry and

leadership ideas from podcasts, articles, speakers and books. Lifelong learning starts by setting goals and implementing habits to support them. By creating the discipline to support a life of learning, CEOs can ensure they are always improving.

In 2024, economists forecast continued economic uncertainty and softness. This makes now as important a time as ever for leaders to make sure they are setting themselves, and their companies, up for success. The Super Bowl is not won in one game alone. It is the result of year-round training, grueling practices, wins, losses and perseverance. Business is the same. Breaking bad habits and implementing and maintaining new ones is hard work. However, great CEOs find joy in the process and are patient as they work toward growth goals.

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