How Your Leadership Style Impacts Your Business Goals

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There's a reason "lead by example" is such a common piece of advice. Look at any well-known figure in society, and you can see the impact they have on others. From celebrities to CEOs of global companies, the way they show up dictates how others around them behave.

I believe leading by example is the only way to lead; it's how I lead at Wistia. My approach to leadership is guided by two concepts: being curious to inspire continuous improvement and being intentional in everything I do.

Here's how I think about these attributes in a leader and their impact on an organization and its people.

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Be curious

Curiosity can be described as "questioning everything," and this is best done when it comes from a place of genuine interest. Why is something working so well (so we can do more of it)? Why is something not working how you want it to (so we can improve it)?

Asking questions to understand better how something works (or doesn't work) is a critical part of leadership. Consider, for example, the extremely powerful question of *"what if?"* Though a simple phrase, it can open doors to deeper and more engaging conversations to explore new ideas or angles of what could be.

Let’s acknowledge the elephant in the room: Can you, as the leader, be taken seriously when asking questions? Short answer: Yes. I think the strongest leaders are those continuously looking for new information or different viewpoints.

Being effectively curious (and not just asking questions for the sake of asking questions) requires self-awareness and paying attention to your instincts. What does your gut tell you when you hear about a challenge or an opportunity? I admit that learning to listen to my gut took time and practice, but trusting your instincts is part of what creates a strong leader.

Speaking of questions, be honest with yourself when you don’t know the answer. Admit to having more questions and work with your team to seek out the answer(s). What might be the answer today might not be the answer in a year, so remember to clearly and consistently communicate organizational goals so everyone is aligned on the target.

Being curious is a critical trait. We look for curiosity in our team members – I want our team to challenge our ideas and help us think bigger and differently. Asking questions of yourself and others is the only way to continuously learn and evolve.

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Be intentional

I believe good leadership has a direct correlation to being authentic. How I show up and how I do things dictates how others are showing up and doing their work, as well. I mentioned it before – people in any leadership role or capacity will set the tone for others. So, how are you setting the tone in your organization?

This matters in both a physical and virtual sense, especially if your organization operates in any sort of hybrid or remote environment.

Here's a good exercise to check yourself and see how you show up.

- **Your meeting presence** – Are you talking too much? Are you actively listening? Do you give others time and encourage them to share?
- **Your schedule** – Do you allow meetings to run over? Are you late for meetings? Are you early or on time?
- **Preparation** – Do you come to your meetings with an agenda? Do you communicate goals and intentions with each meeting?
- **Communication** – Are you sending emails at all hours? Are you scheduling messages to go out during working hours, even when working late?
- **Support and praise** – Do you support and praise others frequently and openly? Do you reserve praise for reviews or feedback-driven conversations?

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In each of these exercises, there's an important note of intentionality:

- **Meeting presence** – Though you are at the top of your company's organization chart, pause and let the experts talk and share opinions. Your knowledge as a CEO means your expertise is likely different from that of someone in marketing, sales or product development. *Be intentional in listening.*
- **Your schedule** – If you allow meetings to run over, other meetings will, too. And everyone is familiar with the trickle-down effect; one meeting is 2 minutes late, which means the next meeting starts 3 minutes late, and so on. *Be intentional with everyone's time.*

- **Preparation** – We've all been to meetings with no clear goal or direction; there's a reason "this meeting should have been an email" has become a funny saying on mugs and the focus of so many memes. If you're not clear on the purpose of a meeting or show up without an agenda, others will do the same. Meetings will be ineffective, and decisions won't get made. *Be intentional in how you run meetings.*
- **Communication** – If your organization's operating hours are from 9-5, respect it. Avoid messaging or emailing off-hours unless it's an emergency. People notice when you send emails or Slack messages at odd hours, even if it's only occasionally. *Be intentional in when and how you communicate.*
- **Support and praise** – When I applaud someone for a job well done, I notice others are more willing to applaud other team members' work, too. And when I take advantage of our untracked vacation time, others do, too. *Be intentional with your feedback.*

As I mentioned before, being in a leadership role means you unintentionally set the tone for appropriate behavior. But this unintentional mimicking of behavior has a dark side, too; look at Apple. There's a drastic difference in leadership styles between Steve Jobs and Tim Cook, and the leadership style directly impacts the organization's direction, tone and culture.

This is why I intentionally share company goals and reiterate them at the start of every all-hands meeting. Repetition is key to ensuring everyone knows our goals and those goals remain top-of-mind in our day-to-day activities.

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Intentionally choose curiosity

Leading by example is so much more than having a leadership title. It’s important to remember that your organization’s culture is reflective of how you choose to lead. Be curious to seek out new ideas and opportunities. Try new things and learn from your mistakes to continuously improve, doing better next time.

Follow your instincts and be intentional in how you show up. This has a lasting impression on your team and a direct impact on your organization’s culture.

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