

These 4 Popular Mantras Contain Valuable Lessons in Leadership

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Some old sayings are popular because they stand the test of time. You've heard them from family and friends alike: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth; treat others the way you want to be treated. There are four wise mantras that speak to the ebb and flow of business, containing vital lessons that will help you navigate the rough spots as you build your dream.

1. Everything happens for a reason

We don't plan to fail or let someone take advantage of us or lose an account, but these things do happen. Going into the situation with our eyes open and willing to learn will prevent a bad decision from growing into a crisis. In business, everything is character-building. The heartbreaks teach you more than the wins.

As a legally blind CEO and broadcaster, I interview people on my radio show. Since I can't see note cards, I immerse myself in their story, memorizing the events of their lives and how they felt about these events. Blindness has allowed me to become a much better listener. Some of my guests have said, "You know my life better than I know my life." Hosts usually sit across from their subject with a list of questions; I memorize my guest's entire life story and every question comes from the heart. My way is the Nancy way, born from necessity, but it's more effective.

When you can't see the way through a crisis, take time to sit down and make a chart. In the left column, list the tough circumstances – the negative events. In the right column, list the things you have accomplished of which you are most proud. You will be surprised at the victories you have gained. You will see that you pushed through the negative events that are now overshadowed by your successes.

Related: I'm a Blind CEO – Here Are 3 Lessons I've Learned About Finding Alternative Ways to Be Your Most Productive Self.

2. You can't judge a book by its cover

Running a company, one of the first things you learn is that people defy their outward appearances. You will consistently find yourself in a position to judge others: a new co-worker, a new client or a candidate in an interview. You may meet a new colleague with a disability. If you can't see beyond labels to the skills and gifts a person may possess, you will miss out.

I remember back when vision loss made it impossible to drive. I was a real estate agent, so I had to take the bus to get to my clients. Dressed in my best suit, I had my briefcase, carrying everything with me in case they wanted to make an offer. I sat in the front where the handicapped section was so I could hear the bus driver call out my stop to me. A woman came over to me yelling, "How dare you! This section is for disabled people! You don't need this seat. What kind of diva do you think you are?"

It was a most startling example of "Don't judge a book by its cover." She saw me as a young, polished executive. *Disabled people don't look like that woman*, she thought.

Biases and prejudices exist. If your company struggles in this area, you can start with awareness. Does your company promote women or people of color? Learn what disabled people can do and how they do it. In your workplace, inspire volunteerism. Pick a cause that needs support and help those groups by raising money, having someone come and speak at your organization or partnering with advocacy groups to encourage underrepresented people to apply to your company.

3. Call it a day

Has adversity ever made you more determined than ever to finish something? That's a good trait when you're working as a team to accomplish a goal, but there are times when you can give yourself permission to walk away. You can always return with a fresh pair of eyes. This happens to me when technology stops working, especially when it flips out in the afternoon.

As a business leader, you might try to work in spite of emotional upheaval, whether its grief over a breakup or anger over a flat tire on the way to work. Times of frustration or sadness are the worst times to respond to emails that push your buttons or call a meeting based on your reaction to a specific situation. It's important to only hit "send" on the email when you're in a good place. Otherwise, leave it in the draft folder for at least a day.

As an executive, you can give others permission to call it a day. Make it a point to check in with at least three people daily. Listen to the words they use and their tone of voice. You might save the company a client relationship or prevent an unwanted confrontation in the workplace.

4. No pain, no gain

This wise saying comes to us from the world of sports, but it translates well to the world of enterprise. To achieve any

goal worth pursuing, there is going to be pain. You will feel the burn of testing your limits when you build a business.

When you start out, you may envision the road to your career goals as a smooth journey, but the pain of it is working around busy schedules, bringing people with diverse ideas together and the heartache of replacing good people when they leave. If you can begin with a realistic set of expectations – knowing that the unexpected can surface at any moment – you will face your circumstances with a troubleshooting mindset, finding ways to work with your challenges instead of against them.

When vision loss progressed to the point I could no longer drive, my clients had to adjust to driving us around. It wasn't ideal, but I found a solution that worked.

You can use pen/paper or a private blog to keep track of these watershed moments, the times you faced adversity and overcame the odds. You will look back and see your strength – the pain you felt and the overcoming moment when you pushed through. You will see what you learned, how you grew, and the insight you gained.

Related: 5 Mantras of Successful Entrepreneurs You Can Use to Improve Your Life and Habits

Conclusion

There is a power in some of these wise statements that you can harness, depending on your company's mission. You can even make your own mantra. After all, someone came up with these familiar truisms, likely after coming out of a bad situation. Whether your slogan is "To infinity and beyond" or "Look before you leap," mantras can serve as reminders of what really matters, keeping you on the path to fulfilling your vision.

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