

Better bosses

A recent article of The Wall Street Journal brought a cryptic review of a new book, [12: The Elements of Great Managing](#). Apparently, the book's publishers don't want reviewers to give anything away – so they try to restrict what the reviewers can say about the 12 elements described in the book.

Well, I haven't read the book, a successor to the bestseller "Good to Great," so I can't spill the beans – I have no idea what is in the book, even after reading the WSJ review.

But I have something to say about great management – or rather, great leadership.

You see, management is all about taking care of "things." It's no surprise that companies refer to employees as "human resources," and that they tend to look at employees as assets and liabilities to be traded, discharged, and used up at will. As far as managers at most companies are concerned, employees are little more than furniture – something to be used up, broken down, and thrown away.

I have no doubt that there are good managers, and even great managers. Perhaps the great managers the book title speaks of are really leaders, not managers, by my definition. But I don't know about you, but I don't want a great manager – I want a great leader. I want someone I can follow, not just someone I have to bow down to whenever performance review season comes around.

The fact is – a great leader can make all the difference to the company. A great leader inspires the company – her or his attitude seems to infect the company with enthusiasm and positive attitude. In fact, a great leader does more than just this – a great leader infects the company with greatness.

So, what are the elements that define a great leader?

1. A great leader believes – He or she believes in themselves and in the company. He or she believes in their vision of where the company should go. They believe in their ability to take the company to the right destination. They believe in people who work with them. They believe in their abilities – or in their ability to develop the talents and abilities they will need to take the company higher, faster, better.

2. A great leader listens – The best leaders are always listening. They listen to the people who tell them "yes," and they listen to the people who say "no." They listen to those who describe the potential, and to those who describe the pitfalls.

A great leader listens to his or her employees – and makes it easy for the employees to communicate their concerns to the leaders. Rank-and-file employees know a lot about what's happening in the company – and often more than the leader does himself or herself. Great leaders listen to the customer, the worker, the stockholder. Great leaders listen – and learn from what they hear.

3. Great leaders have a vision – A former U.S. president always referred to it as “that vision thing,” possibly because he didn't quite know what it was. Vision, as I'm defining it, is the ability to visualize where a company – or an individual – should be going. The great leaders gain that vision by seeing, developing and utilizing the potential a company or individual has. How do they do that? Great leaders look for **hidden value** and **hidden opportunities** that other people don't see. In other words, great leaders gain vision by becoming a “value detector.”

Vision is a tricky thing – developing it can take a lot of time, study, and trouble – but one day, all of that experience coalesces into a state where, as a leader, you simply “know” what is right. The solution will be obvious to the great leader – and she or he won't know exactly why – but they will know that it's the right way to go.

4. Great leaders inspire – and they actively work at inspiring the people around them. Let's face it – most of aren't going to be inspired by yet another PowerPoint presentation, no matter what font and cute graphics were used.

5. Great leaders care – and it shows. They care about the company, they care about the stockholders, they care about their employees. They care more about the company, and less about their own stock options.

6. Great leaders learn – they may not know everything, but they will work hard to learn it. They learn about the business, they learn about their people, they learn about their customers – and it shows.

7. Great leaders grow – they get better and better. And the company, its employees, and its customers grow as a result.

Well, it's not a list of twelve great things about managers, but this seven point list about great leadership can help us understand how to spot a great leader, or how to become one ourselves.

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