

JUST FOLLOW OUR TRACKS

to being a great leader

Leadership and Business

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acknowledgment

Many thanks go to Stacey Finkle for all her help in preparing this work. This work would not have been possible were it not for her assistance.

Who is Incedo?

Master Certified Coach Linda Finkle is the CEO of Incedo Group, a boutique firm that works with businesses to make practical and long lasting changes and solve core business problems. Linda is a catalyst for change, her no-nonsense approach and first-hand experience in running a business is evident in the success of the companies she has helped.

For more than 30 years, Linda has helped many companies in different industries lead changes in employee attitude, communication and company culture. Her advice has prompted even some of the most established executives to re-think their strategies and communicate with their people in more effective ways. Not only has she improved productivity and revenue, she has also enhanced business and staff relationships throughout all levels of an organization. As a result, she has bridged the gap amongst previously incompatible business partners, significantly improved company revenue and employee retention. To say that she can move mountains with her communication and coaching skills is an understatement.

Prior to the success of her coaching company, she built and managed her own executive search firm. Her recruitment agency hired talents for Fortune 500 companies and small to mid-sized business, and was ranked among the top 10 recruiting firms in the country. In spite of her success, she continued to be hands-on with her business, successfully placing candidates that oftentimes lasted well beyond the typical tenure. Linda is a Master Certified Coach from the International Coach Federation (ICF). She has a degree from the University of Ohio and certification from Coach U. She teaches the University of Miami's esteemed coach training program. Her book, *Finding the Fork in the Road*, hit the bestseller list on Amazon.

Incedo helps you create an environment that keeps your company fresh and on the cutting edge. Whether you are a business owners, a corporate executive or a partner in a business, Incedo helps you identify what holds you back or gets in your way. We find creative solutions to tough problems and support you as you establish strong relationships with colleagues, employees, clients and all other business associations. So whether your challenge is crisis and conflict management, or you feel like you and your organization are running in place, your business is successful but relationships are strained, there is no succession plan, you aren't sure if you have the right (or enough) emerging leaders to take you to the next level...Incedo is here to help.

In short we help you build an environment that fosters innovative thinking, strong communication and trust. Companies use Incedo because we do a great job! We have a strong suite of programs that touch on organizational development, strategic planning, sales and customer service, and leadership development. Our presentations rock, at least that's what attendees tell us. We are not afraid to bring humor into the executive office and workshop room. Is this all talk? Our follow-up studies indicate that people remember what we had to say months later.

Linda Finkle has an easy-going, take-no-prisoners style about her. Her clients know that while they will have fun, they will be doing solid work. You can count on Linda's willingness to cut to the chase and her no nonsense but fun way of being to move you and your company from ordinary to extraordinary. At Incedo we believe coaching is an art form, to be enjoyed and inspire both the client and the coach. We want to work with your company to help achieve your business goals and do it in a way that is effective and edgy.

Located in the Washington, DC area we've done extensive work with clients across North America, and also in Europe and Asia. We invite you to join us, enjoy the journey, and be inspired throughout the process.

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

Leadership isn't just a title or a place on the organizational chart. Leadership is the ability to motivate a group of people toward a common goal. We at Incedo Group believe so strongly in this topic that we have dedicated an entire ebook—in fact, three ebooks—to this subject. In this one the focus is on managing people and teams. Each of the books can be read in any order, as each highlights different aspects of leadership.

The articles and Top 10 lists contained in this ebook address the issue of managing people and teams, and offer tools and ideas to improve your effectiveness as a leader in these areas. Our goal at Incedo is to help you gain confidence in yourself as a leader, yet understanding that you will make mistakes, and that mistakes, just like the successes, offer you learning opportunities. Managing people and teams successfully doesn't happen simply because you are in the role of leader. It takes time, patience, work and a deep willingness to consider new ways of looking at things.

If you've purchased the other ebooks, you know that at Incedo we believe that all great leaders have one characteristic in common: They are continual learners and take every opportunity for self-development and to improve their skills. In fact, one of the articles in this ebook addresses this subject. Great leaders truly believe that they have something to learn from everyone they come in contact with and every experience they have.

This ebook is to help open your mind to new ways of looking at leadership and business. It's to help answer the questions you have about stress management, ethics, managing competing commitments, dealing with fear, and more. Our aim is to provide you with a resource you can come back to again and again as you encounter new situations, or those you faced before and want a new way to handle. Ultimately we want you to be the best leader you can be. Providing yourself with the tools to handle the challenges you face as a leader means you will spend less time on these issues and more time on strategy and building your company.

Today's leaders face more challenges than ever. Economic pressures are forcing leaders to do more with less. Boards and shareholders are more demanding. Competition is fierce, and technology is changing so fast many companies are having difficulty keeping up. Add in the four-generations-in-the-workplace issues, top talent being scarce, and rising costs, and it's a recipe for stress, frustration and challenges that can push even the strongest leaders to their knees. And just about the time you think you have your arms wrapped around it, a new challenge arises, and you are faced with an ever-changing landscape. Sometimes forward thinking may feel like it's forward thinking to tomorrow because by the next day things might have changed.

Think about the performer on stage with spinning plates on poles, trying to keep them all spinning and not have them fall. Leaders today are very much like this entertainer, keeping the plates spinning and also juggling several balls on the side. No wonder they question what to do, what's the right decision, and which direction to take.

Every leader faces challenges at some time in their career. Most will face a crisis of confidence, perhaps when something big goes very wrong. Some leaders are terrified of failure and avoid taking risks, which will limit both their own growth and the potential of their company. Almost daily they are presented with ethical considerations that don't always come with clear-cut options. When they make a mistake, and they will, should they apologize? What about being demanding and having high standards for staff and vendors? The list of challenges leaders face daily goes on and on.

While they are faced with these demands, everyone around them is looking to them for the answers. Leaders are expected to be all-knowing. At the very least they need to appear to know the answers and certainly 'never let others see them sweat.' Add this up and it's a wonder that anyone wants to take on a leadership role. But today we need strong, competent and confident leaders more than ever. Those who embrace the demands of leadership, recognizing that they personally must grow in order to meet these demands, will succeed. They will take their companies to new heights and bring everyone who works with them to new levels of development. While success never comes without sacrifice, these top leaders understand the delicate balance that is necessary. They are watchful of their people and their resources, and leave nothing to chance. Gratitude and humility are part of their DNA.

Renowned leaders see challenges as just that: a hurdle, not a stop sign. They understand the importance of relationships, and value each and every one. Their intuition is highly tuned, and they use it to help them make decisions and move their people and company to greatness. For them, leadership is not a title, it's a mission.

We at Incedo Group firmly believe that all great leaders understand this and more. They build high trust relationships and model the behaviors they want to see in others. They earn respect from those around them each and every day by demonstrating the qualities others admire and want to emulate. The pages that follow offer insights and ideas on how to anticipate the challenges, navigate through the storms, and become, in the words of the Army, all you can be.

One

Ethics: The Most Important Business Leadership Skill to Have

There is a lot of discussion on what is THE one most important business leadership skill for an executive to have. In my mind, it's ethics. Ethics is one of those subjects for which there is no standardized measurement. My definition of what is ethical may be very different from yours. That's OK. What isn't OK is a leader who does not communicate their ethical standards and/or changes them on a whim. Trust is built when people know they can count on you. That happens when they know what to expect because your actions are consistent and you've communicated your standards and expectations. And if your actions are either inconsistent with what you say or they change when it's expedient, then others don't know what to expect and trust is lost or never exists in the first place.

This is why I believe that the one most important business leadership skill to have is ethics. Strong ethics build trust. Trust builds relationships and relationships build success. Yes, there are other business leadership skills to have but if you don't have strong ethics, then all the others combined won't help.

Two

Leadership Skill Training Should Include Learning to Rock The Boat

How often do you hear Don't rock the boat; now's not the time to make changes; it's tough out there; we have to keep things on a steady course; things are going just fine; if it ain't broke don't change it? Sailors know that even in calm seas they must be constantly on the lookout and adjusting course. The Titanic sank because assumptions were made and people became complacent. Rocking the boat is just what we need to see the possibilities, and yet it's not often taught as part of leadership skill training. Why is that? I have an opinion.

It seems to me that companies don't reward people for taking risks or rocking the boat; in fact, just the opposite is true more often than not. Many companies scold, chastise and make wrong people when they take risks and the outcome isn't successful. And while companies may profess that they want new thinking and for people to step up and share ideas and tell the leaders when they disagree, the truth is often far different.

So if leaders and business owners aren't encouraging risk-taking and rocking the boat, then clearly leadership skill training isn't going to include this. It's sad that so many companies feel this way. Think of the opportunities they miss and the possibilities that exist if they would open themselves up to rocking the boat.

Three

Traits of Successful Leaders

What are the secrets of true leadership? Who is a successful leader? Are you? There's no doubt that there are many executives leading companies today without true success. In today's challenging business landscape, no one can believe that mere position and title make a successful leader. There are good leaders and there are not-so-good leaders. So, what does it take to make a leader truly successful?

Each leader wears a variety of hats for the organization and yet all leader have certain qualities that allow them to influence and implement change and success.

What are these qualities? I offer the following suggestions:

1. High standards, strong ethics and integrity
2. Charisma - not necessarily in the flashy or extroverted sense, but a sure ability to interface with people well and show them how you can empower them and improve their individual circumstances as well as the company'
3. Willingness to be vulnerable - showing your weaknesses, admitting mistakes, asking for help, seeking others advice, ideas and support.
4. Passion to create something much bigger than yourself.
5. Ability to reinvent yourself or your business - able to respond to changes in the business landscape quickly.
6. Clarity about yourself - know why you are on this planet and gain strength and insight from this.
7. Risk taker personality
8. Confidence (without cockiness)
9. Willingness to admit that you need help – be able to laugh at yourself
10. Driven to succeed
11. Free spirited yet centered
12. Understand the importance of structure in building an organization as well as the importance of flexibility within this structure.

There is a bottom line truth about successful leadership. While it's a fact of life that the business landscape will continue to change, the traits of successful leaders remain constant. The principles are timeless. It's imperative for your success, and the growth of your business, that you learn to cultivate the leader within you.

Four

Leadership in the Workplace Means Using the 'F' Word

Got your attention, didn't I? Now I don't mean what you are thinking; I mean the 'F' word FAILURE. Leadership in the workplace has to recognize, embrace and accept failure. Sure, we all want things to go smoothly, but truth is they often don't and thus it's no wonder that people see failure as bad, as a dirty word.

What would it look like if, rather than labeling any task or action that didn't turn out as originally planned as a "failure," we saw each of them as learning opportunities...? What might we create? What opportunities might arise for us? What would change if we were able to step away from self-blame and move forward into celebration? Leadership in the workplace starts with managers, leaders and business owners building a culture that allows for mistakes, and yes, even failures.

These leaders understand that if there are no mistakes then people aren't taking risks. And they recognize this creates an opportunity for learning, and that nothing new, creative, innovative or exciting happens without taking risks. So go ahead, use the 'F' word. When you do, you'll be in the select group of leaders who have created a culture that encourages creativity, innovation and celebration.

Five

Business Leadership Skill: Become A Great Follower

If you could develop just one business leadership skill, what would it be? I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. In my opinion, the most difficult business leadership skills combination to find is a great leader who is also a great follower.

The truth is that you have to be both. A great leader inspires those around him/her to do great things. But a leader needs to lead by example when the time comes for him/her to follow. To borrow from Bob Dylan, "You gotta serve somebody." Truly great leaders serve their people and work to make them successful. By definition, a leader is nothing without willing and motivated followers. Great leaders beget great followers. A strong, compelling, charismatic and engaging leader will create a followership, even among other leaders. It stands to reason that they must understand what it is to be a follower. So next time you are asked what is the one business leadership skill that makes a great leader, instead of referring to ethics, integrity, communication or anything else, consider saying, 'Being a great follower.' I bet you'll be surprised at how people respond to this.

Six

Leadership In Business: When Being Right Can Be Dead Right

One of the most commonly held beliefs by humans is that we are right. People at all levels in an organization are often muttering, “If they would listen to me, they would see I’m right.” Or, “If they had followed my advice we wouldn’t be having this problem.” Leadership in business means that we can’t be right all the time. In fact, if we were right all the time, all we would need is a bunch of good soldiers who implement. Yet when I talk to leaders, the comment I often hear is *How come I can’t get people to think outside the box and step up?* If we want people to think like entrepreneurs instead of employees, we have to get over the need to be right.

When being right serves to make us feel better, but does not endear us to others, being right can be dead right. Being right allows leaders to avoid looking for the solution and to focus on the problem. Leadership in business means you have to focus on solutions, rather than problems. You have to give up thinking, “If only they had followed my advice.” I worked with a client for many years whose favorite expression was “It’s good to be King.” Took him many months to recognize that even if he was right, even if he knew all the answers, no one he worked with appreciated his saying so. In fact, this belief cost him a huge promotion. So remember, leadership in business does not include having to be right. In fact, it may be deadly.

Seven

Leadership Skill Training: Can Courage Be Taught

A couple of months ago I wrote a post on the importance of learning to ‘rock the boat’. One point I believe I neglected to include was that it takes courage to rock the boat. I asked a number of colleagues and friends if they thought courage could be taught or was innate. The responses were a mix, as you might expect. Then I looked on the Internet to see if there were any leadership skill training courses on courage and I couldn’t find any.

I guess we need to begin by defining *courage*. Dictionary.com defines it as ‘the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery.’ In many instances this definition makes sense. Does it apply to business and one’s ability to take risks and accept the consequences? Is that courage, or something else?

Here I want to focus on the question: Can courage be taught, and if so, why is it not included in leadership skill training? I think we are all born with courage. Then events in our lives shape us and we learn the value of courage or learn that being courageous isn’t necessarily positive or respected (think [Enron](#)). We learn from our parents, teachers and friends. We learn at our churches and synagogues and at work. Each new relationship teaches us something about courage and either encourages us to be courageous or teaches us be afraid or let others be courageous.

I don’t necessarily think that courage can be taught. I do, however, believe that leadership skill training can and should teach us the benefits of courage and how to access our innate courageousness. Yes, it should start with teaching our children, but if they miss this powerful lesson at least we can teach our leaders.

Maybe it’s time for a revolution, a revolution that encourages courage and rewards those who demonstrate it in the workplace. The military bestows medals for courageous behavior. How would our companies change if we adopted this same system?

Eight

Top 5 Hurdles That Women CEO's Face

1. **Learning to say “no”**

Everyone, but particularly women, likes to appease the important people in their lives. Women too often act on this desire to appease at the expense of doing what is right for them. As a result, women overextend themselves, taking on more than they can handle. Women must learn to say no to family, friends, co-workers, and superiors. Learning to say no requires women to understand their personal boundaries and abide by those boundaries.

2. **Balancing personal interests with work interests**

Certainly both men and women find it difficult to achieve work-life balance. Women, however, are more likely to struggle with the competing interests of their careers and motherhood. While times have progressed, women remain the primary caretakers in many households. Caretaking demands a lot of time and energy. Women must learn not to spread themselves too thin.

3. **Overcoming the mindset that their needs come last**

Women need to make a point of scheduling in personal time to assure that competing demands do not override their own needs. While putting others first is a commendable goal, the practice results in exhaustion and leads to feelings of being overwhelmed. Instead, women should strive for a healthy mix of meeting their own needs and meeting others.

4. **Deciphering the “shoulds” from the “musts”**

Time management involves a lot of decision making. Women CEOs must constantly assess and re-assess the needs of their company. They need to decide what must be done and what can be put on the back burner since every last task cannot get done.

5. **Proving their competency**

Unfortunately we still live in a male-dominated world, which means that women CEO's have a more difficult time gaining acceptance. Women CEO's must prove themselves to be competent, professional, and equally as capable as their male counterparts. Male CEO's typically are presumed competent and have to work to prove otherwise.

Warning signs may present themselves in a variety of ways ranging from subtle nuances to classic case symptoms. The following are some of the classic symptoms that managers should consider when observing and evaluating their employees:

Nine

Creating A Sales Culture

Sales are the driving force behind any company. Let's face it, without sales there won't be a company for very long. Because sales are so vital to an organization, how does one create a sales culture that works? Culture is the sum of the values, customs, traditions and beliefs that make a company unique. Basically it's how you and your staff interpret experiences and behave, individually and in a group. Thus the sales culture is what you do about selling, how you do it, what beliefs you have about selling...everything that you think and do relative to the sales process.

What's important here is to look at how you manage sales people, the sales process and your beliefs about sales people and the sales process. If everything is working as you want, then I suspect you have already created a sales culture that works. On the other hand, if you find sales below targets, turnover rate in your sales team is high, every sale is a struggle or, in your heart, you know something needs to change, then look at your sales culture.

The sales culture of a company needs to change as the business changes. External and internal factors cause companies to change over time. Assuming that what got you here will get you there is foolish and naïve. Sales cultures need to adjust as the needs of the business change. When things aren't working, the first step is to go back to basics. If sales aren't what you want, then examine your sales culture. I'm betting it's outdated or no longer serving your company in the economic climate you live in today.

Ten

Getting Past Fear: A Critical Business Leadership Skill

Open [The Wall Street Journal](#) or turn on [CNN](#), and the news is scary: Unemployment, the economy, who's in and who's out politically, mergers, acquisitions. It can all seem overwhelming and scary. Getting past this fear is not only important; it's a critical business leadership skill. Fear is paralyzing. It keeps us focused on what's wrong or not working instead of seeing possibilities. Instead of building on our strengths, fear has us focus on our weaknesses.

I often tell clients who are gripped by fear to simply hold their nose and jump into the deep end of the pool. Perhaps it sounds too simple and even Pollyanna-ish, as there are clearly repercussions to all decisions. Here's what I see often happens with people, though.

They stand around the pool, circling it, testing the water, checking the markings on the side for the depth of the water and worry they will get in over their heads. While they are considering all the cons (with very little focus on the pros), someone else has jumped into the pool. By the time they say, "Hey, it's OK. Look, they did it so it must be OK," their competition is on to the next thing and passing them by. Just jump into the pool and trust yourself to know you're not likely to drown. So what if you flounder around and don't look elegant? Who cares if it's deeper than you thought? You aren't likely to drown and besides, in getting past your fear and making a decision, you are likely to learn something along the way. All fear does is provide the excuse for staying stuck, living status quo and not taking risks. If you want to be the follower rather than the leader, that's fine, don't change. However, if you want to be the leader and beat the pants off your competition, then learn to get past fear. It's a critical business leadership skill for every leader and entrepreneur to develop.

Eleven

Should Leaders Apologize? Is It An Effective Leadership Skill?

Should leaders **apologize**? Is it an *effective leadership skill*, and to what end? I believe that leaders need to model the behavior they want from the people in their organization. If a leader makes a big mistake or their decisions cause a problem, they should step in front of it, both internally and externally, if applicable. How can you expect others to admit their own mistakes if you don't?

This goes to a deeper cultural issue. Does your organization create a culture where people feel secure admitting when they misstepped or even downright messed up? Or do they believe it'll be "off with their heads" if they step up?

What are the benefits of apologizing for a leader? A leader's apologizing? It builds trust and morale. It lets people know that you are humble and imperfect, and that it's not the mistake but how you handle it. People are more likely to take risks and be creative because fear of repercussions is not part of their thought process. Accountability builds.

I could keep going but you get the point. Leaders who are able to apologize when it's appropriate to do so gain so much, though the benefits are difficult to quantify.

Obviously, I believe that in the right circumstances apologizing can be beneficial, assuming it's sincere. Apologizing because you think it's the right thing to do or your PR or marketing department said you should will come across as insincere. So only apologize when it **comes from your heart**. If you're in your head, don't bother.

Learning to apologize and how to apologize is important. It can be an effective leadership skill if used judiciously and in the right circumstance.

Twelve

Feeling Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable: An Essential Business Leadership Skill

Leaders are encouraged to take action, sometimes with a limited amount of information. Risk goes along with making decisions without all the facts. Risk also accompanies with doing nothing or even making the easy decision that seems like it has no risk. We never know definitely if we are making the right decision, and it's often only in hindsight that we are able to know if our decision was the right one. The inability to 'know' causes discomfort for most people and stress for many. To me, one of the business leadership skills we don't teach is learning how to feel comfortable with being uncomfortable.

When I work with clients they often ask me to help them learn to make decisions without feeling uncomfortable about the decision or how they arrived at it. I tell them they will never get over the feeling of discomfort. Sure, at times they won't feel this, but in life we simply never know for sure if we are making the right decisions. When we are faced with having to decide, we will examine the facts, draw upon our past experiences, ask other people for their insights, and some of us "go with our gut." All of that helps us come to the conclusion we ultimately make, and we still don't know without a shadow of a doubt that the choice we made was the right one.

I would be thrilled if companies understood this and taught their executives and managers that learning to feel comfortable with being uncomfortable is an important business leadership skill to develop. Instead we urge them to 'get over their discomfort' and move on. What if instead we help them realize that it's actually acceptable to experience this discomfort or uncertainty, and the skill to learn is being with this natural and acceptable feeling? What if we acknowledged that there is no perfect decision, that we make them with the information we have at that point in time and some of them turn out to be brilliant and others don't? I bet if we shared this point of view with leaders, then a whole lot more decisions would get made, many situations would get handled quicker and there would be less angst about the process or the result reached.

Next time you are considering business leadership skills to develop in your people, I encourage you to look at helping them learn how to feel comfortable with being uncomfortable. I expect you'll see huge gains at many levels.

Thirteen

Ways To Stay Resilient During Difficult Times

Albert Einstein once pointed out, “In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity.” This is true. But the challenge for most leaders is how to stay focused on opportunity when the difficulties are overwhelming? It’s crucial to have a set of tools and strategies that will help you weather the storms and keep you resilient during these difficult times.

1. **Manage Your Stress by Identifying the Cause:** Determining the cause is the first step towards managing your stress. Is the stress from feeling overwhelmed and not having the required resources? Are you unsure what to do? Do you have questions and not know where to turn for answers or is fear gripping you so tightly you find yourself unable to make decisions or take action? Until you identify the root cause of this feeling, you can’t manage the stress itself.
2. **Remind yourself what IS working.** Often when faced with difficult situations we only see what’s going wrong - not all the pieces that *are* working. It’s easy to get sucked into focusing on the gloom and doom. Yet if you take the time to list all of the parts of your business (and life) that are working well, you’ll be amazed at how much longer that list is than you expected. Gratitude is an emotion that moves you forward, while resignation or resentment will keep you stuck.
3. **Steady as you go.** There is a tendency to make sweeping changes when we face challenges or problems. Our reaction is to do something different, either as a knee jerk reaction or because we think different must be better. Watch for this tendency, it can be deadly. Keep your course steady until you’ve had time to reflect on the problem. Time has a way of giving us a different perspective on situations.
4. **Don’t lose faith.** Leaders often face a crisis of confidence during challenging times. They question themselves and every decision they’ve ever made. The skills and experience they previously utilized when making decisions suddenly seem to have evaporated. Since the leader no longer trusts him or herself to make good decisions, they simply don’t make them - or they pass the responsibility on to someone else in the organization who may not have the big picture view, the strategic thinking skills or the knowledge to make the right decision. Don’t lose faith in yourself. These challenges aren’t your fault; most likely you couldn’t have anticipated or prevented them.

5. **Focus on the root problem, not the symptom.** When facing a problem it's so easy to treat the symptom and not spend the time to identify the root problem. If your top sales person just resigned, scurrying to replace them may seem like the right step...and it may be. However, before you do, dig a bit to understand why this key person resigned. Was it about their unfulfilled needs or something about your organization? Was it a result that you could have prevented (or at least recognized as a possibility) had you not been focused on other issues and missed the clues? Uncovering the root problem may not change your next step, however treating the symptom will often simply lead to the same problem reoccurring down the road. Slow down and take a good look before jumping to a solution.
6. **Clarify the issue.** When unanticipated situations occur, we can become overwhelmed or confused. Before you act, walk through the following 7 steps to clarify the core issue and break through to action and resolution.
 - a. Recognize the issue. What do I most want to resolve?
 - b. Understand the issue: How long has it been going on? Exactly how bad are things?
 - c. Determine the impact: How is this issue impacting me? What results are being produced? How is this issue impacting others? What are my emotions when I consider the impact of this issue?
 - d. Establish future implications: If nothing changes what is likely to happen? What is at stake?
 - e. Explore your personal contribution to this issue.
 - f. Describe the ideal outcome: When this issue is resolved what difference will it make? What results will I enjoy?
 - g. Commit to action: What is the most potent step you could take to move this issue towards resolution? What's going to get in your way?
7. **Don't go it alone.** As leaders, the tendency is to 'do it yourself' and never let them see you sweat. That's how you got to where you are in the first place. You toughed it out, you trusted your instincts, you figured it out yourself and you didn't ask for help. It might have worked for you then, but now is not the time to be a 'tough guy' and go it alone. Show your vulnerability to your staff, your family, your friends, your colleagues. Ask for help and take support from them. Others aren't frightened by this; in fact it builds deep trust and loyalty. They want to help, they want to support you and show their investment in the business. Let them. Both of you will receive a gift.
8. **Keep laughing.** Laughter is truly the best medicine. We've heard the expression time and again. Medical studies indicate that laughter boosts levels of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, and suppresses levels of epinephrine, the stress hormone. Time and time again the data has proven that the physiological effects of laughter in the immune system alone can increase the number and activity of T cells and natural killer cells that attack viruses, foreign cells and cancer cells. Laughter is a stimulant to your immune system. It just makes us feel better, and it makes others around us feel better. Keep laughing and you'll see the impact on your physical health, your mental state, your emotional well-being and those around you. It's contagious.

9. **Visualize the future.** Studies show that people who visualize their desires more often get what they want. Our intentions are powerful tools that help us achieve what we want most. When we are faced with problems, challenges and unexpected situations our inclination is to look backwards rather than forward. Don't live in the past. Visualize what you want the future to be and live there.

10. **Don't ignore or push aside your emotions.** Every emotion reveals something really valuable. Rather than being negative or positive, emotions move us into or away from action. So the emotions we have impact the actions we take and thereby, the results we get. If your emotion is fear, the actions you take come from fear, and your results will be substantially different than if your actions had been motivated by optimism. Our culture does not reward us for recognizing our emotions, and men in particular are not reared to acknowledge them. Ignoring your emotions may *seem* like the right action, yet it's imperative to understand that our emotions will impact our actions - whether we are willing to acknowledge them or not.

Fourteen

Stress Management Is A Key Business Leadership Skill

Leaders and executives have a lot of stress in their professional lives. Today they are doing more with less, have boards to answer to which make high demands of them, and they're asked to be strategic thinkers and good implementers at the same time. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. So why is it that one of the key business leadership skills no one talks about is stress management for executives?

Seems to me that with all the stress leaders are under, this should be a key business leadership skill that is talked about and taught to them. We have a lot of data on how to manage stress, so why bother teaching this as a leadership skill? Don't executives already know how to manage stress? Maybe they do, but maybe they don't even realize how much stress they are under and how to recognize the symptoms of stress. Yes, I know all the ideas on stress reduction...exercise, eat properly, outside interests, get enough sleep and more. I just wonder if all the leaders, managers and executives who are working long hours, are responsible for more than ever, have huge demands on their time, and more responsibility than ever recognize how much professional stress they are under. My guess is that they take it in stride, as part of the job. Yet who works well under stress?

Which of us is at our peak performance under strain and anxiety? Clearly I've been on my soapbox today, but to me stress management should be a key business leadership skill.

Fifteen

Top 8 Tips To Help Women CEO's Beat The Odds

1. **Learn to let things go**

First and foremost, you must accept that being a woman does not mean you can do it all. If you embrace this mindset it will be much easier for you to willingly lighten your plate. With only twenty-four hours in a day, certain tasks are bound to fall by the wayside. As long as you have prioritized your “musts” then you can handle the “shoulds” later or not at all.

2. **Stay focused on the important stuff**

Hold firmly to your goals and commit to their achievement. Presumably your goals represent those personal or professional benchmarks that have utmost importance to you. You therefore will feel the greatest satisfaction when you accomplish those goals. Permit your lesser objectives to sit on the backburner.

3. **Define your own boundaries**

Determine for yourself what can be expected of you and voice those boundaries to colleagues and supervisors. Do not permit other people's expectations to expand your limits or dictate your schedule. Refuse to take on more than you can handle so that you do not reach burnout.

4. **Build time for yourself into your work calendar**

CEOs are constantly under pressure. The intensity of that work environment can create a lot of stress. To avoid feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, CEOs must build downtime into their schedules. This means that you must plan your time off early in the year, mark the days or weeks on your calendar, and make the necessary arrangements at work when your vacation days arise.

5. **Outsource tasks you do not need to personally undertake**

When you cannot control the stress that work creates, it becomes essential for you to maintain a smooth home life. As money permits, you should hire others to clean your house or help care for your children. By eliminating the major time drains in your personal life, you gain more personal time and therefore, more room to relax.

6. Ask for the help you need

Learn to ask for help when you need it without viewing it as a weakness. Asking for help does not make you incompetent nor does it set a bad precedent. In fact, you probably will find that your peers will respect you for seeking their assistance. After all, two heads are better than one.

7. Be realistic about your abilities

Set achievable goals and expectations for yourself each day. Doing so will help you avoid the disappointment that accompanies holding a list of uncompleted tasks. Your overriding goal should be to leave work everyday feeling accomplished. By setting realistic and achievable goals you put yourself in a position to be able to cross out items on your list. Seeing progress produces feelings of accomplishment.

8. Explore alternative work schedules

If you find that the demands of your home life and the demands of your job often clash then it is time to make other arrangements. Many companies now offer flex programs and telecommuting options. If available, you absolutely should take advantage of such opportunities. If your company has not developed alternative work programs then help your company come into the new age

Sixteen

Effective Leaders Know That Lessons Are Everywhere

One of the mistakes leaders make is not seeing everything through the lens of “**what can we learn from this?**”. Truly *effective leaders* understand that lessons are everywhere and if they take the time to stop and assess, the take-aways from that process are invaluable. When leaders ask, “What can we learn from this?” others often assume that something went wrong, or didn’t work as planned, we need to debrief, tear it apart and figure out how to prevent this in the future. And sometimes that’s exactly what is being asked.

But why do we assume that lessons are only about what went wrong or what we can do better in the future? Lessons can be positive, and these positive lessons are often just as useful as whatever we glean from something that didn’t work. Sometimes I think we spend most of our time focusing on what went wrong, what’s lacking, how far we still have to go, instead of noticing what worked, how far we have come and what we have to be grateful for.

Maybe the pressure applied from corporate boards and shareholders has our leaders continually looking for improvement and what’s next. I get that; both are important. Yet there is so much to learn from what is working, why it’s working, how we got here, that it saddens me when we so narrowly define lessons as what we need to change.

If you planned a garden, planted everything perfectly, watered and fed and weeded your garden, and it turned out glorious, wouldn’t you celebrate? And when others asked, “How did you create such a beautiful garden?” you’d share your lessons on watering, feeding, finding the right plants for the location, and on and on.

Effective leaders know that the **lessons** are everywhere, and we can learn as much from what worked as what didn’t. Next time you ask your team, “What can we learn from this?” make sure they can glean learnings from everything, not just the things that didn’t work as well as planned.

Seventeen

Leadership in Business: What We Can Learn from Artificial Intelligence

I have been studying [Kabbalah](#) which is, in simple terms, the study of the mystical part of Judaism. Many religions have a mystical component that serves to teach practical tools for creating lasting fulfillment. This post, however, is NOT about religion or Kabbalah. The reason I bring it up is that recently I was listening to a CD that discussed artificial intelligence and how it relates to the world today. [Wikipedia](#) defines artificial intelligence as ‘an intelligent agent which is a system that perceives its environment and takes actions that maximize its chances of success.’

I think we as leaders in business could learn a lot from artificial intelligence. From what I understand, artificial intelligence software takes what it has learned and stores that information. It applies each new piece of information it gathers to the previous data and creates a new solution or new way of looking at things so that the outcome is different. It continues to operate this way with each new piece of incoming data so that the next generation of data is different from the last.

Isn't that what leadership in business should be about? Taking each new piece of information and adding to the data from before to create a new outcome through actions that maximize the chances of success? How might businesses change if, instead of simply collecting information, or taking the information we collect and merely changing course, we massage the data, add it to what we already know and take actions as a result of this new perspective? Then each time we learn something new we add it to what we already know and seek to understand how this new information can change our actions so we achieve success.

In our hectic world where results are valued, we don't often stop and analyze our steps before taking actions. Then we wonder why we don't have the success we thought would occur. Just think what we as the leadership in business could learn from artificial intelligence.

Eighteen

Looking For Lessons

Lessons are everywhere, if we want to look for them. What we often do, however, is ignore them, miss seeing them, or don't take the time to understand what we can learn from them. Lessons can be incredibly powerful and can help us move in ways we wouldn't have otherwise. Life gives us what we need to learn. Here are some key points about lessons.

1. Lessons aren't just about what didn't work. Yes, it's important to examine things when they didn't work out as you planned. It's equally important to look for the lessons when things go really well. What made it work? Was it a change in direction, focus, expectations, delivery...? Maybe what made it work was a shift in a belief or a way of looking at things. Lessons come from what works as well as what doesn't.

2. You have to write them down. Talking about the lessons learned is only part of the process. In order to recognize patterns you have to write the lessons down. Often it's in the process of reading the lessons that you begin to see the patterns. While the lesson itself may be powerful, the patterns you see can completely shift your thinking.

3. Lessons aren't about judgment. When things don't go as planned, our tendency is to ignore the potential lessons. What if it becomes clear we made a horrible decision? What if we totally blew it? What if...? This list of *what ifs* could be enormous. But looking for the lessons isn't about making you wrong or heaping guilt and blame on yourself. Looking for the lessons is to help you by examining the outcome. Yes, sometimes that means accepting responsibility for a poor decision, but isn't that a great lesson itself?

4. Lessons are meant to be shared. Don't keep them a secret; share them with others, even if they weren't involved. We all can learn from each other, and what you learned may help someone else. They may also add new insights or even an additional lesson you missed.

5. Be a constant explorer and have a beginner's mind. If we continue to think the same way and do things the same way, we are likely to get similar results. Every day we grow and change as human beings. We shed skin cells and hair, and new cells and hair grow. If we allow ourselves to, we can learn something new every day, and that opens up new possibilities. Critical for uncovering lessons is having a willingness to learn new things, to be the constant explorer and discard old beliefs.

6. Identifying the lessons takes time. What may seem like the lesson at first glance may not be the lesson. Maybe you made a hasty decision that turned out poorly. That is not the lesson. The lesson is probably about your belief that you needed to make a hasty decision, or that you have a pattern of hasty decision-making. Perhaps the new product launch didn't go as planned. It might not have been poor planning or implementation. Maybe the lesson is you had too many new things going on all at the same time. In order to uncover the true lesson, you need time to consider, and not accept what looks on the surface to be the answer.

Nineteen

Leadership Skill Training Should Include How To Deal With Competing Commitments

Time-management training, bah, humbug! I don't believe you can manage time, and frankly, at times I think it's difficult to even manage ourselves. All the time and dollars people spend on learning how to manage their time better, while not a waste, don't solve the problem because we are treating only the symptom.

Leadership skills training should be more than just better time-management techniques; it should teach us how to deal with competing commitments, as THAT is the problem. We are all very busy people and most of us want to be able to have a professional career we enjoy and a personal life filled with fun and surrounded by people we love.

The challenge is all of those things compete for our time. And even if we take out the personal aspect at work, things are always competing for our time and often we aren't the ones determining the deadlines. Dealing with competing commitments can be a values issue or it can be an issue of communication, staffing, learning to manage up, learning to say no, perfectionism, too many projects in the development stage, not delegating properly...well, you get the idea. OK, I'll admit you can learn useful techniques in time-management training, but if you really want to be successful, leadership skill training should include learning how to deal with competing commitments.

Twenty

Dealing With Competing Commitments

In today's business world everyone has more to do than is realistically possible. Competition is fierce and leaders are being asked every day to do more with less. Yet few leaders are taught how to manage competing commitments, so they end up working longer and longer hours in an effort to accomplish everything. The following ways of dealing with competing commitments will help you balance your work/life and your energy levels.

- 1. Learn to say No.** Sometimes you don't have the option to say No, but you do more often than you think. Just because someone asks does not mean you have to say Yes. Examine what is already on your plate before automatically saying Yes.
- 2. Offer alternatives.** When someone asks, we either respond Yes or No. Offering alternatives is a way to still say Yes without putting yourself into overwhelm. Can you adjust the date by when you will need it? Is it possible to meet the deadline but provide less information, or have only part of the project completed?
- 3. Values are in conflict.** Competing commitments sometimes occur because our values are in conflict. Maybe we want to go to our child's dance recital but we have client work we committed to complete, and we can't do both. Ask yourself which has the higher value to you and act on that. Maybe you really can call the client and get an extension. Your daughter may understand your not being able to attend if you talk to her and make a 'date' with her.
- 4. Look for resources to help.** You do not need to do it alone. Just because you started something does not mean you can't now hand it off to someone else if another priority arises. Determine what parts can be easily handled by someone else and assign them the task.
- 5. Perfectionism is not required.** Many of us are perfectionists at heart. This means it not only takes longer to complete tasks, but we spend an enormous amount of energy obsessing about them. Sometimes the way to deal with competing priorities is to stop being a perfectionist. You may then actually find that you have time for everything.

6. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. One of the challenges with competing commitments is the belief that we need to complete one thing before going on to the next. Yes, a good feeling comes with that completion factor, but sometimes it's just not possible. You may need to work on several things at the same time. This isn't about multi-tasking but about doing a little bit on each project so that you are making progress on each of them.

7. Accept that competing commitments happen. Going through angst over the fact that you have to make a choice doesn't help. It's part of life. Sometimes we get two invitations for the same day and have to decide which one we will say Yes to and which one we'll say No to. Accept that competing commitments will always be a factor, instead of letting them drive you crazy.

Twenty One

Good Business Leadership Means Demonstrating Frugality

The economic indicators seem to say the economy is improving. Housing sales are up, people are spending money again (though carefully) and unemployment appears to have stabilized. At least we aren't hearing weekly reports of massive layoffs. All good news but we are clearly a long way away from a healthy economy and the heydays of the past. What does all this have to do with good business leadership? A lot!

Good business leadership means demonstrating frugality at all levels. It's more than simply reducing staff or adjusting work hours or shifting staff to part-time. It's more than cutting benefits or having employees pay a greater share of the cost or even cancelling the incentive trip for the sales team. So what does it mean?

Recently I visited an office where the assets were being liquidated because the firm was in receivership. This was a firm with more than 350 people. I've been to many lavish offices, but this one was clearly at the top 10%. No amount of money was spared on the furnishings, artwork or anything else. One of their conference room tables cost in excess of \$50,000. My point? Clearly this firm was doing well financially, until they weren't. Somewhere they lost sight of the fact that good business leadership includes being careful about the way you spend money, even if it seems like there is an endless supply. Did their excessive spending cause their demise? I don't know for sure, but I'm betting it was a contributing factor.

On the opposite end of the spectrum a company I know didn't have a stellar 2009. In fact, they had one of their worst years in the history of the company. What did the two owners do? They decided that they would not take any personal income in 2010 until they could turn the company around. They shared this with all their employees too. Humbling for sure and yet all their employees know their personal commitment to them and the health of the company. The two owners accepted responsibility for the challenges they faced and, in my opinion, demonstrated tremendous leadership.

What other ways can a company display good business leadership by demonstrating frugality? Officers and executives of the company need to be willing to postpone raises, bonuses and company-paid trips for themselves. Every expense needs to be reexamined, even if it was in the budget. Do you really need to redo your marketing brochures this quarter? Is the new computer system a necessity and going to increase productivity, or is it an expense that can be put off for a while? There are many places you can be frugal without sacrificing productivity, performance or client relationships. There are many ways to meet your objectives, but it will require some creativity on your part to accomplish those goals while spending less. You don't have to go it alone. Ask people in the organization for their ideas. I'm positive they can help, and at the same time you'll be showing them your good business leadership skills.

Twenty Two

Effective Budgeting and Planning Are Necessary Business Leadership Skills

Maybe you have already completed your budget and plan for this year. If so, congratulations! Less than 30% of all businesses, especially small businesses, actually go through a formal planning process. I believe that planning (and yes, even budgeting) are necessary business leadership skills to develop, whether you are a business owner or hold a key *leadership* position in a firm. I learned about planning early in my career.

I worked for a food manufacturing firm as manager of Quality Control. The owner of the company believed that every department should write a plan. When I left that industry and went into sales, the new company believed strongly in planning. Every single sales person was required to write a yearly plan and review it with the manager. It was an intense process that included what I was going to do, how I was going to accomplish it and what resources I needed to make it happen. Those skills served me well when I opened my first company.

I can't stress enough the importance of the business leadership skill of planning. If we simply say 'I want 20% growth' without knowing (a) is that growth in revenue or profits?; (b) is it in one area or across the board?; (c) how are we going to make it happen?; (d) what might interfere with our reaching that goal?; (e) what resources will be needed, etc., etc.?, then we have to depend on luck. If we do get lucky, we have no way of knowing how it happened and how to replicate the results.

I've done annual business plans for 30 years. Not every goal was reached, and sometimes the goals changed as new opportunities presented themselves. But one thing I know for sure: Over the years my companies have succeeded, not simply because of hard work on my part but because I developed the business leadership skills of planning and budgeting. If you have yet to write a plan for next year, now might be the time to get started?

Twenty Three

Do's And Don'ts For Business Planning

1. Don't rush through this process. You're busy and this may seem like a huge time hog. I promise the time you spend on the front end will reap huge rewards on the back end.
2. Don't read every book, article and piece of data on business planning you can find. It can be confusing and overwhelming. Stick with a simple process you will follow through with year after year.
3. Don't create unrealistic goals. The plan is not meant to be pie in the sky thinking. It's meant to be something you can realistically accomplish and feel satisfied when you do.
4. Don't ignore your own weakness or the company's weaknesses. One of the values in doing the plan is knowing what these are and creating a plan for handling or a workaround.
5. Don't worry if your first year is all guess work, it might be. You need to begin somewhere to get a base line. Get comfortable with planning and don't worry about it being perfect.
6. Don't expect it all to work out as you planned. Circumstances change, there are things you can't plan for and life happens. Remember the purpose is so you can have a benchmark for the future and a roadmap. Sometimes you have to take a detour if the road is closed.
7. Don't skip steps. While you may wonder why bother with a specific step or think its worthless take the time to complete the steps so you can determine the value.

8. Don't shove your plan in the drawer never to look at again till the next year. Remember this is your road map. You wouldn't plan a trip without knowing where you are staying , how far you are driving in a day, where you are stopping, what sights you are seeing. A plan that is completed and not used to direct your business has value, but you are losing a major benefit.
9. Don't worry about it being perfect. There's no such thing. Each year you will learn a little more and make adjustments. Perfection is a journey, not a destination.
10. Don't forget that part of the value of the plan is the thought process that goes into it, not just the document itself. The document is the outgrowth of your thinking and strategizing and is created to record these thoughts not as a show piece.

Business Plan Dos:

1. Share your plan with others in your organization if appropriate.
2. Ask any department head to prepare a plan for their department. You can use this to incorporate into your master plan for your company.
3. The plan is meant to be a guide in getting you where you want to go. Monthly review your progress and make adjustments as necessary.
4. Do have fun with this. While it will take time it's not meant to be a painful task. This is a great time to put your dreams on paper and create a plan to achieve them.
5. Do be optimistic but realistic. You want to be able to achieve your goals not find yourself continually frustrated.
6. Do take the time to review last year and what you learned. Those lessons can be incredible valuable in helping you as you plan next year.
7. Give yourself enough time to do this well. Each step is going to take some time so start the process in enough time where you won't feel rushed.

8. Do consider your own strengths, gifts and talents when working on the plan. Creating a plan that uses these will help ensure the outcomes you want will occur. Not only will you have more fun but you will be using your natural talents, which makes accomplishing your goals easier.

9. If the plan you are creating is for your business you'll need to include both an operating budget and capital anticipated expenditures.

Do include personal goals in your plan. You are more likely to achieve your business goals if they tie to your personal goals and vice versa.

Conclusion

Thank you for partaking in yet another Incedo Group creation. We hope you enjoyed this learning experience and that you walked away with a glimpse of what it takes to be a successful leader in today's business climate.

As the articles and Top 10 lists demonstrated, it's not easy to be a great leader. Just because one has the title does not make them a great leader, or even a leader. It simply means they have been given a title and a place on the organizational chart. Knowing when to zig and when to zag, or even when to stand still, is something every leader needs to know. Taking these steps when you don't have all the information, using your intuition and experience as your guide, is one mark of a great leader. Accepting the responsibility for the outcomes is what all great leaders do.

Take a look in the mirror. What do you see? Do others see the same person you do? If you can honestly say Yes, I'd say congratulations are in order. Take a look around at your colleagues and friends. What do you admire about them as leaders? How do you think you stack up against them? It's not easy to be a leader; it's challenging to be great. Practice, patience, willingness to take risks and make mistakes, overcoming obstacles, and a willingness to be a constant learner will put you on your way to greatness. But it doesn't stop there. Great leaders...well, each of us defines this differently. How one gets to greatness, though, is always the same. It's through determination, commitment, stumbling and getting up, preparation and a willingness to go where others aren't. How far do you want to go?

As a final note: Remember, this is one of three ebooks on leadership. Each one includes different concepts of leadership. There is no overlap, and the books can be read in any order. Thank you for taking the time to read this Incedo Group compilation. Now go congratulate yourself for investing in yourself. Many hold the title; you have already demonstrated you are more than interested in just the title. Congratulations.