

Knowledge

HOW TO BECOME

A BETTER LEADER



JJ Lynch, Managing Director of training company Leading Edge Leadership, explains why the learners of today are the leaders of tomorrow

It was back in the early 1960s when President John F Kennedy said: “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” I’ve been delivering leadership training for years and the more I read, talk and think about leadership, the more I realise there’s so much to learn about the subject. But one thing is for sure – there’s no such thing as ‘instant leadership’.

Leadership is like a plant. It needs to be nourished in order to grow. The best leaders in the world know they need that thirst for knowledge and new ways of working. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, captured this thinking brilliantly. He said: “Before you become a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others” (*Winning: The Ultimate Business How-To Book*, 2007).

Be a role model

We are always growing – as human beings, colleagues, parents etc – but the moment we become a leader in the workplace everything changes. Success is no longer just about personal growth but about growing others – seeing their potential and turning it into ability. The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership, but for this to happen leaders must become role models for learning.

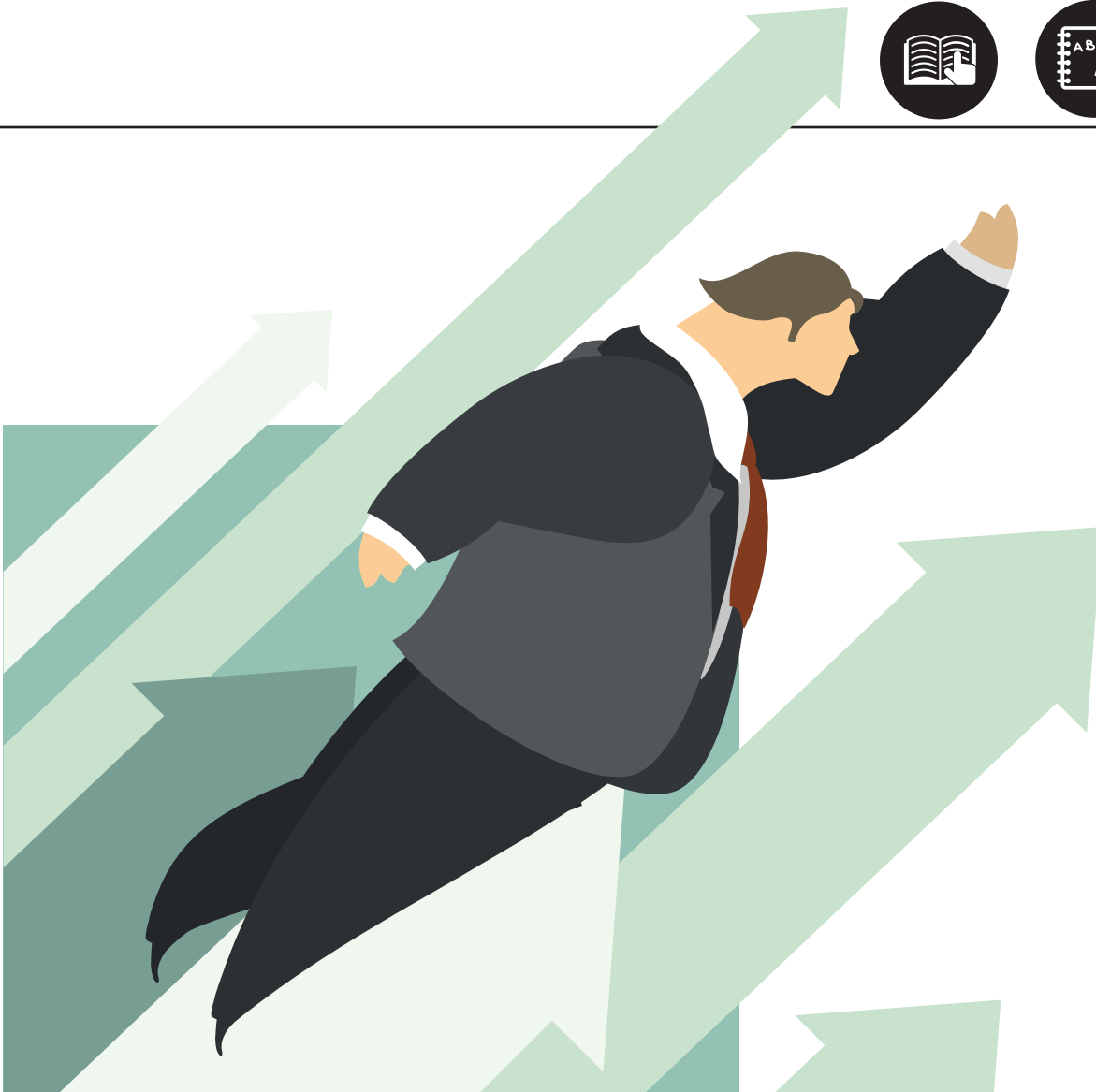
Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a Professor of Business at Harvard Business School, said: “Leaders are more powerful role models when

they learn than when they teach.” And the most powerful form of teaching is to lead by example and we lead by example by showing that we are always willing to learn. We must embrace the skills of today’s fast-paced, data-rich world so we don’t get left behind – otherwise we become followers rather than leaders. Mobile phone manufacturer Blackberry is a perfect example. It lost its place as a leader in the telecommunications market because it didn’t keep up with technological developments.

Here’s another simple thought – to earn more you must learn more. The salary you receive from your employer is determined by the value you add to the organisation, and the more you know the more valuable you become. A few years ago my mentor gave me an essential piece of advice on this that I’ve never forgotten: “Be so knowledgeable, competent and brilliant at what you do that they just can’t ignore you. Become indispensable”.

In order to become a great leader you also need to develop your awareness. With better awareness you make better choices. With better choices you get better results. Taking the time to develop your skills is the best investment you’ll ever make, because every leadership journey is a journey of learning. When Nelson Mandela delivered his inauguration speech as President of South Africa, he spoke about “the person he had become” and the “journey he had walked” in making his leadership dream of a “new South Africa” come true.

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Never stop learning

When we embark on our leadership journey we give ourselves a focus, structure and purpose. We state that we don't want to be ordinary or mediocre but that we want to be confident and credible. You need to develop a love for learning because the best leaders – in every walk of life – do this. Shimon Peres, former Israeli Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner, said: “If you eat three times a day you'll be fed. But if you read three times a day you'll be wise.” An idea discovered in a book can change the way you see the world, an idea heard on a podcast can transform the way you communicate and an idea found in a blog can drive your business to remarkable success.

Earlier this year at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) Learning and Development Exhibition in London I was

asked for my definition of a good leader.

It wasn't an easy question to answer because it's such a subjective question, but this is what I said: “Leaders are born and leadership can be learned. The best leaders are often born leaders, but the very best leaders are leaders who are willing to learn.”

Remember, the learners of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

JJ Lynch is an international leadership trainer, facilitator, motivational speaker and author of the best-selling book, *How To Win – in Life, Business and Everything Else*. He is Managing Director of London-based leadership training company, Leading Edge Leadership.

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