

# Leadership – Building a Customer-Focused, Process Driven Passionate Business

By Chris Holmes, President (ret.) Nortrax, a John Deere Company

Over my career, I've had the privilege of working with and learning from many great entrepreneurs and leaders. As I write this article, we are in the midst of trying to navigate our way through the COVID-19 virus and the impact it will have on family, friends and business. My hope is that many of the principles of leadership that I have learned will not only help guide any business through trying times, but also enable them to regroup, rebuild and succeed. I just can't think of a better time to write an article on leadership.



I have learned that leadership comes in many forms and there is really no one size fits all. What appears to be the common denominator between average and highly successful leaders is the ability to engage and motivate individuals and teams. If I learned anything from successful leaders is that most businesses are in the “people business”. Peel back what you manufacture, sell or service and there is a customer (or employee) at the other end who usually has a choice whether to do business with you and whether it is at a premium or discounted level.

I'm an admirer of Richard Branson and all the success he has earned by simply placing immense focus on his own people. His belief that “If you look after your staff, they'll look after your customers” carries a powerful message for all leaders as we look to drive engagement, loyalty and profitability both with our teams and our customer base. It's really about trust – trust in your vision, trust in your actions and ultimately, do you as a leader care about me as an employee.

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There are countless books and articles on this topic, so I'll just share what I feel has had the biggest impact on businesses I've worked with and learned from over my career. Executing on these will help any leader build a customer focussed, process driven passionate business.

## Top 5 Leadership Success Principles

**#1: *Be There.*** There's a great leadership video based upon Pike's Fish Market in Seattle. Successful leaders are active and visible with their team. Get to your operations on a regular basis and get in front of all your people whether it be a yard or parts person, a technician or a

salesman. You want to get a pulse on the attitude and engagement of your team. There's no better way. Also, have look at things through your customer's eyes and experience what they see and hear. Want to build trust and loyalty throughout your organization? Be visible and....

**Be There.**

**#2: *Expectation Management.*** Expect to be disappointed if your people don't know what to expect. This was a very impactful leadership lesson from my former CEO. I was always amazed when I interacted one on one with teammates with how many didn't fully understand our vision, our strategies and the tactics we all collectively needed to execute on to win the battle for the customer and to run a great business. Assuming everyone understood where we were relative to our goals and objectives, where we needed to be and how we were going to get there was a failed assumption. More on this on the next topic.

**#3: *Strategic and Tactical Development.*** My eyes usually glaze over when I hear leaders use these terms. From my experience with successful leaders, it's in part "the what" each strategy or tactic is, but more "the how" they were developed and will be executed on. Expectation management and this topic are tied together. Most leaders cannot perform each function within their organizations to the level of competency that the individual in that role can. The individuals are at the sharp end of the stick when it comes to customer satisfaction or presenting the company brand in the light you expect as leader or owner.

Identifying the business challenge or opportunity (the what) and engaging those involved in the execution, regardless of the level within the organization, will drive personal ownership at the employee level, engagement, alignment with strategies and tactics, and ultimately, customer/employee satisfaction and results. Brainstorming sessions involving individuals, management and even customers, tend to identify what really matters, the strategies, tactics and what solutions need to be executed on to address the issue. Brainstorming is one very powerful tool to use. Regardless what you call it, get those impacting the outcome involved in creating the strategies and tactics (the how).

**#4: *Effective Communication.*** Note the term "effective." The successful leaders I worked with and for all had this figured out. Transparent, fact based, inclusive style leaders had the hearts and minds of their teams by following #1, #2 & #3 above. Customers felt this when they walked into any operation and felt confident that the people they dealt with cared.

More about "the how" here – if you want full engagement, give full engagement. Emails won't cut it. Leadership at every level needs to nail the communication process through employee meetings, one on one chats, scheduled strategy/tactic progress reviews. Effective communication keeps strategies and tactics as live, working initiatives that creates ownership and results. It takes hard work and time to communicate effectively, but this drives results.

**#5: *Share the Success.*** Transitioning your teams from a "what's in it for me" to a "what's in it for us" will drive loyalty, lower turnover and better engagement, within the organization

and outside with the customer base. Caution however, addressing the personal needs cannot be ignored. We're all motivated by personal fulfillment and money at some level. Executing consistently on #1 through #4 coupled with a clearly understood and communicated individual (job function) performance plans addresses the "what's in it for me" need.

Some form of these top 5 are likely part of your everyday leadership style. And, when executed on a consistent basis, have helped you build a customer focussed, process driven passionate business driving the long-term financial returns you expect and deserve. As noted earlier, there is no one size fits all with leadership success. Hopefully these **Top 5** are a part of your success today. If not, what a great opportunity to learn from others.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Chris P. Holmes has been involved in the Construction, Roadbuilding, Mining and Forestry business over his 35-year career. Before retiring in 2019, Chris served as President & CEO of Nortrax, a John Deere Company overseeing operations in the US and Canada. While at Nortrax, Chris held various executive roles as VP of Business Development, VP Southern and Atlantic Regions, VP Product & Customer Support including the development of a Technology Group focussing on using technology to support advanced customer support.

In addition, Chris served two terms as President of the ESCO dealer board, board member for Deere Customer Support Partner Project Teams and John Deere Information Systems User Group. Chris is also a partner in WHY Capital Inc. and currently establishing a management consulting company. Feel free to provide your comments to Chris at [chris@cvtm.ca](mailto:chris@cvtm.ca) .