

Lessons from General Collin Powell (former US Secretary of State)

Adapted from 1000 Ventures

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1. By treating everyone equally "nicely" regardless of their contributions, you'll simply ensure that the only people you'll wind up angering are the most creative and productive people in the organization.
2. Real leaders make themselves accessible and available.
3. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Policies that emanate from ivory towers often have an adverse impact on the people out in the field who are fighting the wars or bringing in the revenues. Real leaders are vigilant – and combative – in the face of these trends.
4. Don't be afraid to challenge the pros, even in their own backyard. If you have a yes-man working for you, one of you is redundant.
5. Never neglect details. When everyone's mind is dulled or distracted the leader must be doubly vigilant. Good leaders delegate and empower others liberally, but they pay attention to details, every day. The job of the leader is not to be the chief organizer, but the chief disorganizer.
6. You don't know what you can get away with until you try. Good leaders don't wait for official blessing to try out. If you ask enough people for permission, you inevitably come up against someone who believes his job is to say "no". So, the moral is, don't ask.
7. Keep looking below surface appearances. Don't shrink from doing so just because you might not like what you find.
8. Organization doesn't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything, either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds.
9. Organization charts and fancy titles count for next to nothing. In well-run organizations, titles are also pretty meaningless. But titles mean little in terms of real power, which is the capacity to influence and inspire.
10. The most important question in performance evaluation becomes not "How well did you perform your job since the last time we met?" but "How much did you change it?"
11. Leaders honor their core values, but they are flexible in how they execute them.
12. Perpetual optimism is a force of multiplier. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues.
13. You can train a bright, willing novice in the fundamentals of your business fairly readily, but it's a lot harder to train someone to have integrity, judgment, energy, balance and the drive to get things done. Good leaders stack the deck in their favor right in the recruitment phase.

14. Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand. The result? Clarity of purpose, credibility of leadership, and integrity of organization.
15. Once the information is in the 40 to 70 range, go with your gut. Don't wait until you have enough facts to be 100% sure, because by then it is almost always too late.
16. Shift the power and the financial accountability to the folks who are bringing in the beans, not the ones who are counting or analyzing them.
17. Surround yourself with people who take their work seriously, but not themselves, those who work hard and play hard.
18. Command is lonely. You can encourage participate management and bottom-up employee involvement but ultimately, the essence of leadership is the willingness to make the tough, unambiguous choices that will have an impact of the fate of the organization.