



# When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change

Graham Jenkins discusses the single most important thing you can do to become a more effective leader. It's very simple, but it's not easy.

I have always loved this saying: “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change”. For anybody who has consciously decided to make some change to their behaviour at some point in their life, this saying resonates strongly. And then there is the other camp. You know, those people who insist that things don’t change, a glass is always half empty and you can’t rely on anybody to do a job properly? They will always be the kind of person who knows it all but will never be any wiser.

**H**arsh? It is meant to be. People limit their potential simply by refusing to change the way they look at things.

In the world of business leadership, this attitude holds back progress; not just for the leader, but for the entire organisation they lead.

### **Change is good, bring it on!**

We all know that the only one real certainty in life is constant change. So why is it that people who lead companies are often the least likely to change? Of course they are often heard to repeat well-worn sentiments like “if we always do what we’ve always done, we will always get what we’ve always got”.

They are very good at appearing to welcome change. They know it is expected of them and that they will be seen as dinosaurs if they don’t embrace it like they mean it. And many really do believe they want change. They want everybody else in the company to drive change. But not themselves. They do not want to change the way they behave or the way they look at things because many believe they have nothing to learn.

But here’s the thing: in medium and small businesses, it is the skills of the CEO, managing director or business owner that have the largest impact on productivity. And yet so few turn the mirror on themselves when setting strategies to improve the fortunes of their business.

### **Better leaders create better businesses**

In 2007, a joint LSE & McKinsey study highlighted that productivity increases associated with improved management practices are much larger when compared to investment in either capital or labour.

The study, *Management Matters in Australia* in November 2009, focused on the need for better management practices in Australia. This study was specifically for SMEs, who often have less formal education or a management network around them to force self-evaluation and develop better skills. It is in smaller organisations and family-run businesses that poorer management skills can result in lower productivity.

And here is the simple bit: the moment business leaders realise that they don’t have all the answers and it is OK and even enormously constructive to go and seek answers and help from others, is the moment that they instantly become better leaders.

This is when a CEO/Director/Owner truly becomes a leader. They realise that many heads are better than one and you never stop learning and getting better. Being open to that generally makes you a better person to be around as well.

### ***Lonely business executive seeking relationship with others ...***

Sounds like a lonely hearts column doesn’t it? And yet this is the secret to becoming a better leader. Simple yes. Easy? Not for a CEO.

The natural temperament profile for most business leaders includes a tendency to mistrust others. So working together and opening up to others is out of the question right? Sadly, it often is. But a few smart people do seek out coaches, business networks and expert speakers to help them keep learning and self evaluating. They understand that learning from the experience of others is extremely powerful.

### **Embedding change and improvement**

So here’s the really difficult bit: There is no point in surrounding yourself with the best insight and guidance in the world, unless you are going to do something about it. As busy business people, making a long term change to the way we do things is our most elusive skill. Don’t kid yourself you will do it under your own steam. Being open enough to get guidance from others is only half the story. Being brave enough to let them see your progress is the bit that will make all the difference.

If you want to make real changes, make sure somebody you respect knows about what you want to achieve, so they can challenge you. Turning insights and learnings into action, and then being held accountable for those actions, is what turns good “advice” into tangible change and results in higher productivity. It is what will give you the skills

and the drive to cascade better practices through your business.

**How do you become a great leader?**

Trick question really. It was with great relief that I realised some years back that you don't need to be a great leader to build a successful business. But you do need to become a good and competent one.

Go Googling and you will find an abundance of articles listing the top attributes of successful leaders. Let me focus on just one: communication skills.

Undoubtedly essential. After all, who will consistently deliver their best to a leader or manager who cannot explain what they want, or who lacks the skill to encourage, let alone inspire, or fails to describe where the business is going?

No-one is born a great communicator.

Communication skills are learned. If you aspire to lead others, you must deal with this.

**Here are five tips to become a better leader**

1. Work on your listening skills. Seek first to understand. Then be understood.
2. Have the courage to say what you think – but be sensitive to your impact. Bluntness can be a crude weapon, but sensitive communication of your feelings and opinions is a valuable skill.
3. Learn to appreciate the power of body language. Yours and others. Use eye contact. If you can read the body language of others, and be aware of what your own body is saying, your communication will become much more effective.
4. Praise. Think back to when your manager/ CEO appreciated what you did – and told

you so. It feels good to be appreciated. And it feels good to communicate appreciation.

5. Practice. Give presentations. Ask for feedback. Don't avoid difficult situations, but plan how you will handle them successfully. Be patient. New skills may take time to refine.

Today's leaders must be multi-talented and good communication skills are an essential part of the mix.

*Graham Jenkins is a Life Member of the RCSA and ran his own recruitment firm for many years. He is now a coach for senior executives and a Chair with The Executive Connection – a network of CEOs who meet monthly to share their knowledge and address business issues and opportunities.*

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