

Knowledge Base

Leaders Are Elected

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What is it that takes companies to the top of the “Best companies to work for” list?

One short answer is that these companies are lead well. It sounds simple and it is. What is difficult is to lead well. In the following I will share some neuroscience research as well a psychological aspects of what is necessary for todays business leaders, or indeed any leader for that matter, to lead well.

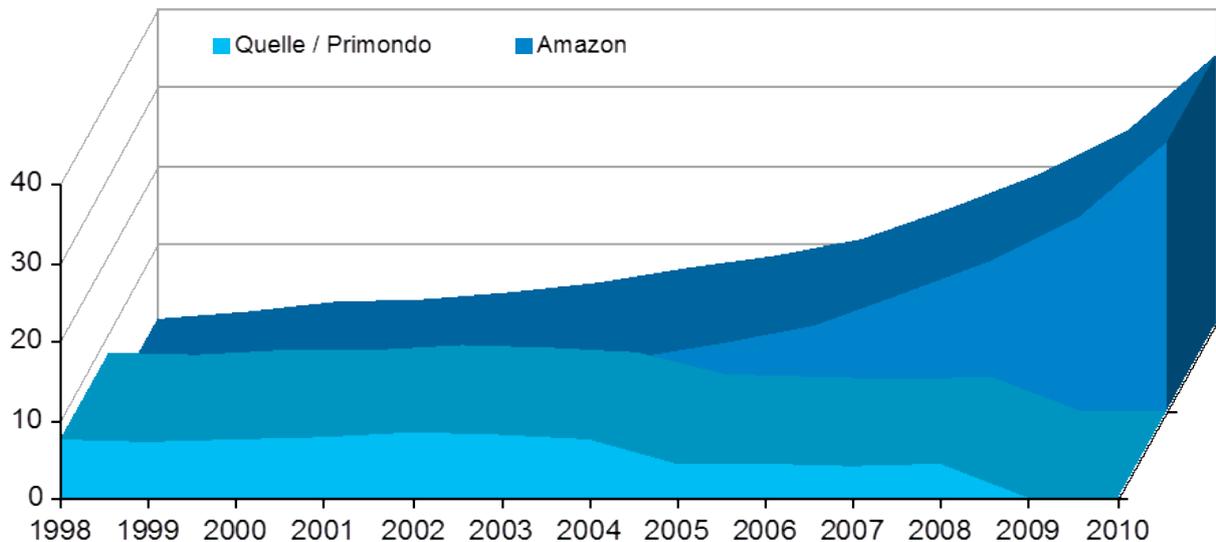
Based on looking into almost 100 organisations it appears to me that the first thing a leader needs to have is impact. Their actions need to have impact on/with customers and employees. Secondly they need to understand that in order to lead, they need to have followers. In todays globalised world people choose whom they want to follow. So who do people today and, possible even more important, tomorrow choose to follow? The great many studies that have been made into the psychology of behavioural science give some answer. One answer, in particular, to this goes back to how the human brain is working. In his book Brain Rules, John Median writes that the human brain is today working the same way it did 20000 years ago when Homo sapiens for the first time “Stood up-right on the Serengeti”. He shows that our behaviour today essential is the same as is has always been i.e. that we are still driven by the same fundamentals.

So what are the fundamentals that we looking for? In 1995 Hycner and Jacobs wrote

“Each human heart yearns for contact – above all it yearns for genuine dialogue. Each of us secretly and desperately yearns to be recognized in our uniqueness, our fullness and our vulnerability”

So how can a leader make that work for: Customers, Employees, peers, bosses and Shareholders? And why is it necessary? The Why-Question is the easiest to answer. As mentioned earlier, Inherently you are only a leader if someone is following you, and as a business leader you need to create a following of: Customers, Employees, peers, bosses and shareholders. First and foremost you need your Customers and Employees WANTING to follow you.

If you do not have customers who chose to follow and buy your product, solution, service etc, it is over pretty fast. This happens not only to small companies but to large ones as well.



Quelle arguable was the Company who in Germany invented the business where you order from a catalogue and the merchandise are sent to your house. In 1927 when the company was founded there was not a word to describe the business, today it is called e-commerce. Quelle went from undisputed number one, to going out of business in about 10 years. And that was in a market that was growing above 10% every year.

In 2007 Nokia was undisputed number one in mobile phone market with a world wide market share of close to 50%. 6 years later they are no longer an independent producer but are set to become a small part of Microsoft with an insignificant market share: History well tell if they manage to stay alive. At the same time Samsung and Apple have completely taken over the market, AND again in a growing market.

These are both cases where the customer chose to follow someone else.

The same is undeniable true for employees. Today they have the opportunity to choose where they work. Likewise if your employees are not willing to follow you they either leave or stay on and only do the absolute minimum, the later being the worst of the two options, unfortunately also the one that generally noticed latest.

The big question is then how to make people follow you:

One way that I have found works very well is to pay attention to 2 things.

- (1) People buy from people
- (2) You quickly forget what it was about, but you never forget how you were treated

Keep these 2 sentences in mind and you will be able to build a strong following, OR if you cannot, you will know why.

So what does that mean? It means that your employees will have to believe in what you as a leader are selling them, and that starts with you having to sell yourself. I am aware that some people do not like when I say, "sell yourself". I offer then try to think of it as selling your ideas/decisions/etc. I am fully aware that when working in an organisation the appointed leader can TELL the people what to do, however it is much more effective if the people believe in it and want to do it.

Just think of the saying: “you can lead a horse to water, you can't make it drink”. You need to sell you yourself, your ideas/decisions/etc. The way to do this is to do what Hycner and Jacobs, almost poetically described. People want a genuine dialog, they want to be listened to and be accepted for their individual uniqueness, what they stand for, their values. This is what you need to do as a leader, listen to your people and understand them.

You will still need to make decision and most of the time tough and hard decisions. You will still need to decisively implement these decisions. What I am talking about is how you get to the decision and with it get you people to support it. In order to give the people a genuine dialog and accept each individual you need to be inclusive.

I think Klaus Stahlmann CEO of Sulzer said “everybody who joins us, can always suggest how we can improve”. This is inclusiveness. This is an invitation to everybody that your opinion matters.

The same things go for your customers as we saw it with Amazon, Samsung and Apple. Today's customers have a plethora of opportunities where they can choose to spend their money. We the consumers/customers have real-time knowledge of everything that happens. We have virtually unlimited possibilities to compare quotes to all sorts of things AND, above all, we would like to be part of something that is meaningful to us.

The Inclusive leader understands this and is therefore the partner who listens to employees and customers. The inclusive leader treats them as partners and sharing information with them. She / He inspires, encourages and acknowledges that the people are individuals. Through her/his actions she/he shows genuine concern. It is a pleasure to work with them, which is why we choose them to be our leader.

The ones who really succeeds are the ones who understands that you get appointed to a certain position, and thereafter you have to earn to right to the job. You need to get elected.

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