

# *The Brutal Truth About Why Being a Leader Is So Hard*

It's not about being right. It's about this instead, alright?

By Nicolas Cole



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Being a great leader is so much harder than it looks.

What's difficult about leadership is that nobody ever sits you down and "teaches" you what being a real leader is all about. There's no class in early education that defines leadership. Peers in group projects tend to label leaders as "overachievers" (and not in a good way). In college, leadership is reduced down to who is going to talk the most during a presentation. And even on sports teams, the leader is usually the best player--and wears a letter on his or her jersey as a trophy of their accomplishments.

But that's not what being a leader is all about. Especially when it comes to building a business.

Whenever I think about the topic of leadership, I feel incredibly lucky to have learned from the mentors I did. At the time, I truly didn't understand how much I was learning by just watching and listening to them on a daily basis. But being out on my own now, and starting my own company, I now realize the massive impact they had on my development--and at the same time, how few people get the kind of exposure that I did, so early on in my career.

At 23 years old, I was sitting in the same room as global CEOs and creative directors.

**This is what I have since learned about leadership--and what makes it so incredibly difficult. Leadership really has nothing to do with the title you hold.**

The moment you start your own company, with your own employees, and overhead, and a cash flow to manage, and people's lives dependent upon you and your ability to provide for the

company, you suddenly realize how many "wantrepreneurs" out there just want the title. They want to call themselves a CEO, more than they actually want to build a working company. They want to talk about raising huge amounts of money instead of questioning how they could achieve the same result on their own. They want to be seen as a leader, instead of mastering the one thing that actually makes a leader a real leader:

Flexibility.

**True leadership is the ability to communicate and effectively reach each and every person you work with, in the way that works best for them.**

It's the ability to be flexible.

When everyone else is stressed, you're calm.

When everyone else is out of gas, you inject more fuel.

When everyone else doesn't know what to do next, you lead by example.

When someone has an issue, you work with them and listen to them on a personal level.

This is where most leaders fail, and I see it happen every single day. The moment someone moves into a position of leadership, they believe that everyone else should accommodate to them and their needs--when actually, it's the opposite.

**As a leader, it's up to you to put yourself second, and operate in a way that allows others to feel at ease, others to feel understood, others to work in the way that's best for them--even if it's not the way you operate.**

Let me give you an example:

Some people are extreme go-getters. Others require a nudge in the right direction. Some people respond well to harsh criticism, and actually thrive off being told all the things they're doing wrong--it gets them fired up. Other people need much more positive reinforcement, and to be given the space to come to those conclusions on their own.

Where self-proclaimed leaders fail is in thinking that however they operate, everyone else should as well. They forget that "different" does not necessarily mean "wrong," and what motivates themselves isn't what's going to motivate everyone else.

Leadership, then, is the art of flexibility. It's being able to adjust and communicate in different ways, specific to each individual person. I don't mean being "everything to everyone." I just mean having enough self-awareness to know what is going to yield the best response from each person--and then having the patience to execute with that behavior in mind.

**Here's why leadership is so tough.**

What makes this mentality so difficult is that, in every capacity, it asks that you, as a leader, put yourself last.

It's a removal of the ego. You can't just rage out of impatience, or get upset because other people aren't working the way you want them to work. You can't show your frustration--even if everyone else is. You can't sit back and complain when times get tough, you have to be the positive force that changes the tide.

You, as a leader, have to take a step back from your impulsive, emotional reactions, and instead operate from a place of calm understanding. And that's a skill that isn't taught in school, it's not taught in after-school clubs, or even on sports teams.

It's learned through watching closely others who embody that trait.

And it's learned through diligent self-inquiry, and constantly practicing the art of being flexible in the way you communicate and lead others.

Source: <https://www.inc.com/nicolas-cole/the-hardest-thing-about-being-a-leader.html>