



## Southern Building Material Association's

# Leadership Tips



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Membership Pays

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*Listening carefully. Shutting up.*

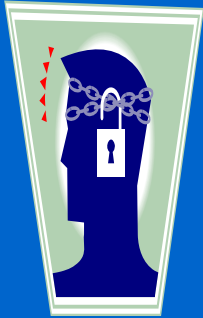
## 10 Traits of Successful Entrepreneurs

by Tim Berry in Back to Fundamentals, Entrepreneurship, Reflections

What are the traits of successful entrepreneurs?

That's quite a challenge. What, besides the obvious, do successful entrepreneurs have in common? I know I'm not sure. But at least I can get the idea started. Maybe you can help. What am I missing?

1. There's a lot of talk about P-words: **passion, perseverance, and persistence**. I mistrust all three. A lot of unsuccessful entrepreneurs have them just as much. You have to have some variation on these traits, but you can have all three and still fail. You and I both know people who never made it and never stopped trying. My favorite P-word in entrepreneurship is **planning**, but that's just me. **Stubbornness** is good too, even without starting with P.
2. I like **empathy**, as in understanding how other people think and feel about things. Empathy leads to understanding what the people you sell to want, what they need, how they think, and how to best reach them. It's hard to imagine somebody building a company without being able to put themselves in the buyer's state of mind.
3. **A sense of fairness**. For dealing with vendors, customers, and employees.
4. **Transferable values**. This is closely related to the sense of fairness. I just don't see people building businesses without believing in what they're doing.
5. **Willingness to work hard**, shoulder to shoulder with other people. Cliche, but true: the harder I work, the luckier I get.
6. **Knowing what they don't know**. To me that's much more important than what you do know.
7. **Listening** carefully. Shutting up.
8. **Vision** for what they can build. Imagining a happy future. Dreaming.
9. **Making mistakes**. You have to deal with failure. Keep pitching.
10. **Jumping viewpoints**, like from short- to long-term in an instant, mixing those viewpoints together. That's like dribbling, keeping your eyes up while managing the ball at your feet.



*Many leaders are very skilled at challenging the thoughts and opinions of others, but are woefully inept when it comes to challenging their own thinking.*

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## The impact of unlearning on leadership

By Lead Change Group

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Many leaders are very skilled at challenging the thoughts and opinions of others, but are woefully inept when it comes to challenging their own thinking. The reality is that it takes no effort to cling to your current thinking; however to change your mind requires you to challenge your mind. I've believed for quite some time the most profound and commonly overlooked aspect of learning is recognizing the necessity of **unlearning**.

How difficult is it for you to change your mind? When was the last time you actually changed your mind? Do you consistently challenge your own thinking, or do you wait for others to bring the challenge to you? When your thinking is confronted, how do you react? I've often said the rigidity of a closed mind is the first step in limiting opportunity. I can think of no better definition for a closed mind than someone unwilling to change their opinions. Smart leaders recognize it's much more valuable to step across mental lines in the sand than to draw them.

Let me begin by suggesting that changing one's mind isn't necessarily the same thing as being wishy-washy. The difference is found in the motivation underpinning the change. If your opinions change with the wind based on little more than the court of public opinion, you're not a leader but just someone else trying to fit in with the cool kids.

There is a big difference between taking a principled stand and trying to be liked. There's also a big difference between standing on conviction versus just wanting to win an argument. When evaluating your position on any given topic, are you trying to learn something, or are you just trying to justify your opinion? Having strong convictions is a healthy thing so long as you're convicted by the truth and not your pride or your ego.

Here's the thing: No one has all the answers, so why even attempt to pretend that you do? Show me a person that never changes their mind, and I'll show you a static thinker who has sentenced his mind to a prison of mediocrity and wasted potential. If the world is constantly changing, if the marketplace is always evolving, if the minds of others are continuously developing, how can you attempt to be unchanging and still be relevant? The smartest people I know are the most willing to change their minds. They don't want to be right, they want the right outcome — they want to learn, grow, develop, and mature.

Smart leaders don't tell people what they should think; they surround themselves with great thinkers, and then consistently seek their insights, observations and opinions. Subjecting yourself to dissenting opinion allows you to refine your good ideas, weed out the bad ideas and acquire new ideas. Moreover, it's the ability to evolve and to nuance thinking that leads to the change and innovation your organization needs to survive.

Leaders and their ability to change their mind demonstrate humility, confidence and maturity. It makes them approachable, and it makes them human. People are looking for authentic, transparent leaders willing to sacrifice their ego in favor of right thinking.

Bottom line — when you fear being wrong more than being proven wrong, you have arrived as a leader.