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E-BOOK SERIES

10 Strategies for Success Lessons from Jeff Bezos, Google, Elon Musk, Warby Parker, and More

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How would you rank? And you would your employees rate you? These questions show which behaviors and traits Google feels great leaders possess.

Google Evaluates Leadership Skills Using These 13 Questions

Every leader wants to be a great leader. But what makes a leader great?

That's a question Google spends considerable time and effort trying to answer. (It only makes sense that one of the most analytical companies in the world puts some of its analytical horsepower into determining how great teams are built and led.) Over time, the company determined the key behaviors of its best team managers. And then Google started asking team members to answer the following questions, using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) scale.

Check them out -- and, more important, consider how your employees would rate you:

1. My manager gives me actionable feedback that helps me improve my performance.
2. My manager does not “micromanage” (get involved in details that should be handled at other levels).
3. My manager shows consideration for me as a person.
4. The actions of my manager show that he/she values the perspective I bring to the team, even if it is different from his/her own.
5. My manager keeps the team focused on our priority results/deliverables.
6. My manager regularly shares relevant information from his/her manager and senior leaders.
7. My manager has had a meaningful discussion with me about career development in the past six months.
8. My manager communicates clear goals for our team.
9. My manager has the technical expertise (e.g., coding in Tech, selling in Global Business, accounting in Finance) required to effectively manage me.
10. I would recommend my manager to other Googlers.
11. I am satisfied with my manager's overall performance as a manager.

And then a couple of fill-in-the-blank questions:

12. What would you recommend your manager keep doing?
13. What would you have your manager change?

One thing immediately jumps out: Only one of the 13 questions, question No. 9, asks employees to rate their manager's hard skills. Every other question focuses on soft skills: communication, feedback, coaching, teamwork, respect, and consideration. The evaluation predominately assesses not what managers know but how they do their jobs. Which means the best managers add value by helping their teams succeed--their success comes from the team's, and each individual on that team's, success. Of course, you could argue that possessing superb technical skills is less important for Google's team managers since

it's easier for Google to recruit and retain incredibly skilled people than it is for many companies.

But that argument misses the point. While early on most employees need some degree of training, the emphasis soon shifts from what they know and can do to how they use their knowledge and skills. For example, take question No. 2: Does my team leader micromanage? Just about every task has a best practice, so most leaders implement and enforce processes and procedures.

For employees, though, engagement and satisfaction are largely based on autonomy and independence. I care the most when it's "mine." I care the most when I feel I have the responsibility and authority not just to do what I'm told but to do what is right. Good leaders establish standards and guidelines, and then give their employees the autonomy and independence to work the way they work best within those guidelines. Good leaders allow their employees to turn "have to" into "want to," because that transforms a job into something much more meaningful: an outward expression of each person's unique skills, talents, and experiences. That is what helps build a great team.

Which is why that is what great leaders do.

Hopefully, like you. ■

As last week showed, Amazon's CEO listens to some people, but not to all.

A Frustrated Amazon Customer Tried to Return Her Package Directly to Jeff Bezos. His Reaction Was Eye-Opening

Many CEOs are shielded from surprises. They make sure there's a buffer between them and anyone who decides they deserve their attention.

At a shareholders' meeting in May 2019, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos had more than one unexpected person demanding his attention. How he dealt with those people was quite fascinating. First was a customer and shareholder so frustrated with trying to return an unwanted package to Amazon that she brought it to the meeting in order to deliver it to Bezos personally. She said she'd tried to return it four times without success.

You might think large security types would have tried to shoo the woman away. Instead, according to Geekwire's Todd Bishop, Bezos offered sympathy, saying: "My apologies that you had to use this unusual venue to accomplish what should have been a routine task." Then he tried to make light of the slightly awkward situation: "Anybody else have anything they need to return?"

Many people might think this a deft, humorous touch. It was a marked contrast, however, to how Amazon's CEO reacted to some of his own employees at the same meeting. Amazon UX designer Emily Cunningham is one of the organizers of a climate change proposal, signed by almost 8,000 of the company's employees. She described her experience of trying to get Bezos and the rest of the shareholders to pay attention: "At the Amazon shareholder meeting, I delivered the presentation about our climate resolution. Still shaking. It was emotional. But feeling excited and exhilarated."

Like the frustrated customer, she asked to speak to Bezos directly. He wasn't on stage at the time. Yet it appeared he wasn't about to come on stage to hear his employees, either. As Business Insider reported, Cunningham asked whether Bezos would at least be listening and was told by a moderator, "I assume so."

If you thought that Bezos's reaction to the frustrated customer was perfectly pitched, his employees weren't so keen on how he reacted to them: "This is not the kind of leadership we need to address the climate crisis. We need a plan, a commitment to zero carbon emissions. Employees no longer 'assume' we're doing enough. We want to lead the way." Perhaps Bezos didn't want to deal with these employees. Perhaps he considered them to be grandstanding. It's instructive, however, that he wasn't able to show respect for his own staff.

They are, after all, interested in a subject most tech companies at least claim to take very seriously.

I contacted Amazon to ask whether Bezos did have at least a more private reaction to the

appeal. A company spokesman wouldn't address the specific proposal. Instead, he told me: "Earlier this year, we announced that we will share our company-wide carbon footprint, along with related goals and programs. We also announced Shipment Zero, our vision to make all Amazon shipments net zero carbon, with 50 percent of all shipments net zero by 2030. Amazon's sustainability team is using a science-based approach to develop data and strategies to ensure a rigorous approach to our sustainability work."

At the meeting, Bezos did answer one employee's question about climate change by saying: "That's a very important issue. It's hard to find an issue that is more important than climate change.... It's also, as everyone knows, a very difficult problem."

Why not, then, address the employees? Bezos claimed that merely by being involved in e-commerce and cloud computing, the company was being more efficient. He added that the company has its own initiatives. Leadership sometimes means showing you're comfortable dealing with the uncomfortable, especially when it comes to addressing a substantial swath of your staff. Though the employee-created climate change proposal was voted down, along with 10 others, would it have been so hard for Bezos to work with these concerned employees?

Isn't it best to have passionate employees on your side, if your interests are aligned?

Wouldn't choosing to work with them have felt like, well, a routine decision? ■

Sometimes the simplest things are the most profound.

Billionaire CEO Sara Blakely Says These 7 Words Are the Best Career Advice She Ever Got

Sara Blakely founded Spanx in her late 20s. The company made \$4 million in sales in its first year and \$10 million in its second year. In 2012, Forbes named Blakely the youngest self-made woman billionaire in the world. She is clearly massively successful. Yet when asked what the best advice she ever received was, she doesn't talk about success.

Instead, she talks about how, as a child, her father would sit her down at the dining room table and ask her the same question: "What did you fail at this week?"

He didn't want to know how many As she'd gotten. He wasn't interested in how many girl scout cookies she'd sold, how many goals she'd scored on her soccer team, or whether she'd gotten a perfect score on her math test. No, he wanted to know what she had failed at. And when she told him, do you know what his reaction was? He high-fived her.

Think about that for a minute: Every week growing up, her father made her reflect on something she'd failed at, then showed her that not only was she still loved after failing, but she was celebrated for it.

In an interview for Fortune, Blakely said, "I didn't realize at the time how much this advice would define not only my future, but my definition of failure. I have realized as an entrepreneur that so many people don't pursue their idea because they were scared or afraid of what could happen. My dad taught me that failing simply just leads you to the next great thing."

Speaking of that, Blakely herself failed the LSATs twice before founding Spanx. On that particular chapter of her life, she says, "It was one of many tests that showed me how some of the biggest failures in our lives just nudge us into another path."

Those who've made it big repeat that one of the main reasons they got to where they are is by taking risks. Over and over, they talk about the importance of taking leaps, which sometimes means falling down:

"Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." --Robert F. Kennedy

"Failure is another steppingstone to greatness." --Oprah

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." --Thomas Edison

Yet, for as many times as we are told that taking risks is good and failing is OK, we tend to shy away from it in our own lives. Why? Probably because we grew up in schools that tended to only reward "success" (getting the answer right). We were trained to become perfectionists.

If you're going to rewrite that script, it's not going to be by convincing yourself of it intellectually. It's going to be by actually doing things you're not sure of or good at, then being proud of yourself for failing. It's not just the failing that'll help you get there--it's the encouragement for trying in the first place.

So: What have you failed at this week? If you can't think of anything, go find something to suck at. If you can, give yourself a high-five.

Then go fail at something else. ■

Elon Musk is trying to get his people to buy into the mission of 'saving the world' by working themselves to the bone. It's not going to work.

It Only Took Elon Musk 10 Words to Reveal Why You Should Never Want to Work for Tesla

Have you ever gotten an email from your CEO at 1 o'clock in the morning? That's about the time Tesla CEO Elon Musk sent a memo to Tesla employees one Friday in January 2019, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. (Technically, it was 1:20 a.m. in California, where Tesla is based.) And let's just say the email wasn't pretty.

After highlighting Tesla's numerous accomplishments over the past year, Musk got down and dirty, announcing another round of job cuts--this time reducing the number of full-time employees by about 7 percent. The job cuts are necessary, Musk argues, to help the company meet the unique challenges it faces. Challenges like "making our cars, batteries, and solar products cost-competitive with fossil fuels," products that Musk admits "are still too expensive for most people." Musk also acknowledges that since Tesla is competing "against massive, entrenched competitors ... [employees] must work much harder than other manufacturers to survive."

All of this hard work is worth it, Musk says, to support the "mission of accelerating the advent of sustainable transport and energy, which is important for all life on Earth." It's hard not to be inspired by this message. Everyone--including the world's major car manufacturers--knows the continued use of fossil fuels is not sustainable. And no one can deny that those companies probably wouldn't be as vested in clean energy as they currently are if it weren't for Tesla leading the charge.

But while I'm a fan of much of Musk's philosophy, it's the next part of the memo that worries me:

There are many companies that can offer a better work-life balance, because they are larger and more mature or in industries that are not so voraciously competitive. Attempting to build affordable clean energy products at scale necessarily requires extreme effort and relentless creativity, but succeeding in our mission is essential to ensure that the future is good, so we must do everything we can to advance the cause.

"We must do everything we can to advance the cause." Musk's personal goal to save the planet may be admirable, but what he's implying here is not. In fact, these 10 words are a perfect example of what is known as the "dark side" of emotional intelligence. We generally think of emotional intelligence as a positive quality, one that can help you manage conflict or establish deeper relationships. But in my book *EQ Applied*, I describe how people can also use their knowledge and understanding of emotions to motivate or even manipulate others with the sole intent of strategically achieving a goal.

Once that goal is reached, or when individuals are no longer helpful to pursuit of the goal, they are discarded with little or no concern for their well-being. While it's likely that

Musk truly believes his own rhetoric, what he's trying to achieve--namely, getting people to buy into the mission of "saving the world" by working themselves to the bone--simply isn't sustainable. And it's hurting Tesla employees in the process.

In contrast, the most effective mission-driven organizations encourage balance and taking care of oneself. They realize that anything other than that is foolish and will hurt the cause in the end, in the form of damaged workers and, subsequently, damaged culture.

Yes, the best organizations use their messaging to inspire their people and reach them on an emotional level. But they do so while keeping their individual needs in mind. The best organizations encourage their people to get enough sleep by not sending emails at 1 in the morning. The best organizations encourage their people to take time off, by providing an adequate vacation policy--and encouraging company leaders to set the right example by not working on their own vacations. The best organizations set a pace their people can maintain indefinitely. Because they realize that long-term success is brought about, not necessarily by those who are the fastest or who work the longest days, but by those who are steady and reliable.

By keeping the big picture in view, and treating their employees as real people--as opposed to disposable commodities--the best organizations inspire company loyalty.

The sooner Musk faces this reality, the greater Tesla's chances of truly changing the world. ■

According to Steve Jobs, one simple decision--and one simple word--will never let you down.

Steve Jobs Said 1 Thing Separates Successful People From Everyone Else (and Will Make All the Difference In Your Life)

Steve Jobs had extremely high expectations. He challenged himself--and the people around him--to work smarter, work longer, and work harder so he, and they, could accomplish everything they dreamed possible. Jobs believed in the power of asking. Jobs believed the future was something we can all make our mark upon. And maybe even more important, Steve Jobs believed in the fundamental power of belief itself -- and of using that belief to motivate and inspire.

As Jobs said: “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something--your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”

One of the biggest reasons most of us don’t set out to achieve a huge goal is that we think we first need to develop a comprehensively detailed grand plan, one where every step is charted, every milestone identified--where success is pre-ordained. But because we don’t have that kind of plan--because creating that kind of plan is basically impossible--we hesitate. We need to see an end before we see a beginning.

And so we never start.

Jobs knew that plans are never perfect. Only in hindsight can they appear that way. Here’s what really happens. People who eventually find success start by trying things. Lots of things. They succeed at some. They fail at others. They learn from those successes and those failures. And along the way they seize and at times even create their own opportunities to advance themselves.

Want to start a business? Want to improve your health and fitness? Want to change careers? Determine the first steps. Get started. Keep going. Most important, trust yourself. Trust that you’ll figure out how to react and how to respond to roadblocks and challenges. Trust that you will become a little wiser for the experience. Trust that you’ll grow more skilled, more experienced, and more connected. Try enough things, learn from every success and every setback, and in time you’ll have all the skills, knowledge, and experience you need.

You can never guarantee that you will always succeed, but when you never bet on yourself and try something new, you can definitely guarantee that you will never succeed. Trust that the dots will someday connect. Believe that the dots will someday connect. In the meantime, your life will be a lot more interesting.

And a lot more fun. ■

Outdoor Voices' Tyler Haney picked up and moved there. Tim Ferriss is a transplant. Now Apple wants to expand there in a big way. Here's why the Texas city is booming.

Outdoor Voices Packed Up Its 40 Employees and Moved to Austin--and You Should Too

Just a few blocks from a forest of glassy new skyscrapers, including the tallest residential building west of the Mississippi, about 70 young women in yoga pants (and a few men) dance and stretch to a Cardi B song on an impossibly green lawn. At the head of the group stands Tyler Haney, the 30-year-old founder and CEO of Outdoor Voices, who uprooted her New York City athleisure e-apparel company to relocate to Austin in 2017.

“All right, everyone! Woo!” Haney shouts before leading the crowd into a huddle on the lawn next to her company’s first store. Then off they jog to begin the company’s inaugural “Hippie Triathlon,” which will involve, among other things, laps at Deep Eddy Pool, a local institution, and burgers and beers at a tiki restaurant tucked behind a dive bar.

The scene verges on a parody of Austin circa 2018, no longer the scruffy college town known for its slacker culture, rowdy live music venues, and clothing-optional festivals. Today, the Austin area, with a population of 2.1 million, is one of the fastest-growing in the country. Funky old Austin still exists, but it lives in the shadow of the city’s now-shiny lifestyle brand, one that’s defined by the likes of Whole Foods and South by Southwest (both headquartered here; both formerly scruffy).

And now, too, by ambitious transplants like Haney, whose company has raised almost \$60 million in venture capital and counts retail legend Mickey Drexler, of J.Crew fame, as its board chairman. The Austin store (“the worst retail location I’ve ever seen, potentially in the world,” Haney remembers Drexler, a lifelong New Yorker, call it when he first saw it) now sells about as much as the company’s stores in New York and San Francisco.

Haney was just starting Outdoor Voices in New York when she first visited Austin, in 2013. A former track athlete from Boulder, Colorado, who landed in New York to attend Parsons School of Design, she found herself at Barton Springs, a legendary Austin swimming hole just across the lake from downtown. “The moment I dipped into the water, I was like, ‘Holy shit, this could be the spiritual home, potentially the long-term home, for OV,’” she says. New York was brimming with online apparel brands, but as Haney’s company started to grow, she kept returning to Austin (where, at the time, she was dating a restaurateur). “It struck me that the city is super supportive of entrepreneurship,” she says. She decided to make the move.

Haney’s hardly alone. Startups from Nebraska (Spreatail), Tennessee (SnapShot Interactive), Arkansas (YouEarnedIt), and California (Optimizely, Outdoorsy) have all recently opened offices or relocated here, along with Peter Thiel’s venture capital firm Mithril Capital Management, which in September announced it was ditching San Francisco in favor of the city. Tech giants including Facebook, Amazon, and Dropbox have all established presences here. Google recently planted a giant “G” logo atop a high-rise downtown. And in December, Apple, which already has its second-largest outpost in Austin--with some 6,000 employees--announced it will be investing \$1 billion to build a new campus less than a mile away with a projected 15,000 new jobs.

According to our Surge Cities Index analysis, Austin ranks first in the nation in population growth, third in its density of high-growth companies, and sixth in its rate of job creation.

But the city's rise has been three long decades in the making. When Dell minted a crop of so-called Dellionaires, the resulting wave of tech startups in the early aughts reinforced the Austin moniker Silicon Hills. After Whole Foods grew into a major force in the grocery business around the same time, it became a launchpad for dozens of startup food and personal care brands. After a late-'90s software outfit, Trilogy, lured hundreds of elite college grads to Austin with great perks, many of them went on to create a B2B software industry in the city. The Trilogy Mafia, as they're called, still control many of the most influential companies in town, such as the WordPress hosting platform WP Engine, run by an ex-Trilogy VP, Heather Brunner. Joshua Baer, another Trilogy alum, created and runs Capital Factory, an incubator, co-working place, and investment fund. And then there's South by Southwest, which began in 1987 as a music festival and has since ballooned into a two-week extravaganza of music, film, comedy, gaming, and all things startup.

According to our analysis, the amount of money being poured into Austin's startup scene still ranks only fourth in the nation when it comes to early-stage funding deals. Capital Factory's Baer says that's because Austin has yet to produce a giant, transformative consumer tech company, which typically leads to a flood of venture capital. But he believes it's only a matter of time. "Talent is the leading indicator, and funding is the trailing indicator," he says. "This is where all the talent is going."

As Austin's skyline fills with construction cranes, it's easy to draw parallels to cities like Seattle, where an Amazon boom has driven housing prices and homelessness to unsustainable levels. That may concern Austin locals, but for arrivals from places like New York and San Francisco, the city is still very affordable (the median price of a home here is \$385,000, according to Zillow). The state's attitude toward taxes--"The only good tax is a dead tax," Governor Greg Abbott once said--doesn't hurt either.

When Haney decided to move Outdoor Voices to Austin, she had about 40 employees join her from around the country; 34 made the move with her--they all drove down in a caravan--and only a few have since left the city. The business has continued growing triple digits every year since its founding, Haney says, and now employs 130 people full time. She finds that Austin's lifestyle often seals the deal when she's hiring designers from New York--just as it did for her. "At first, I was nervous that we wouldn't be able to attract talent at all," she says. "But being away from New York has actually become an advantage." ■

The Microsoft co-founder credits Buffett with teaching him many valuable lessons about running a business and doing good in the world..

4 Essential Lessons Bill Gates Learned From Warren Buffett About Life and Business

Bill Gates may be the richest man in the world, while Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett currently holds the number three spot, but Gates frequently tips his cap to Buffett for teaching him many lessons about managing a staff, communication and of course, investing. During the past two years, Gates has written extensively about everything he's learned from Buffett.

Here are four lessons Gates credits Buffett with teaching him that have changed his outlook on business and the world.

1. Help your employees help you.

One of the management philosophies Gates admires in Buffett is the way he is flexible and loyal with his staff, even eliminating some of the tasks they don't like. "The Berkshire system maximizes having very experienced people run their businesses, giving them autonomy, and letting them do it for decades at a time," Gates writes on his blog. "Even if they make a few mistakes, they know that Warren will stick with them. That's how he has put together a mind-blowingly good set of business managers."

2. Beat the market by ignoring it.

Successful investing involves exploiting the mistakes the market has made in undervaluing certain companies, Buffett once told Gates. So rather than taking cues from the market or following its path, Buffett advises people to instead focus "on a company's moat--its competitive advantage--and whether the moat is shrinking or growing," Gates writes. "He says a shareholder has to act as if he owns the entire business, looking at the future profit stream and deciding what it's worth."

3. Use your platform to speak your mind.

Buffett's willingness to speak publicly on a wide range of topics--some of them controversial--has inspired Gates to comment on both the good and the bad when it comes to government policy and his work with The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Some of Buffett's comments that Gates respects the most include his criticism of stock options and financial derivatives. "He's not afraid to take positions, like his stand on raising taxes on the rich, that run counter to his self-interest," Gates writes.

4. Know how to value your time.

One of the most impressive skills Gates admires in Buffett is the way he makes himself very accessible without spreading himself too thin. "He doesn't let his calendar get filled up with useless meetings," Gates writes. "On the other hand, he's very generous with his

time for the people he trusts.”

Gates also credits Buffett with introducing him to his favorite business book--*Business Adventures* by John Brooks--and for advising him on how to get the most out of his foundation.

“It turns out that Warren’s brilliant way of looking at the world is just as useful in attacking poverty and disease as it is in building a business,” Gates writes. ■

The eyeglasses company loved touting its 'buy one, give one' social mission. But it failed to move customers, and the startup was forced to change gears.

Warby Parker Had a Mission. Its Customers Didn't Care. Here's How the Company Changed Its Message

Neil Blumenthal is the co-founder and co-CEO of Warby Parker. The nine-year-old eyeglasses company was a direct-to-consumer pioneer, known for its style, service, and reasonable prices. In its early days, the co-founders thought Warby Parker would also become known for its ambitious social initiative: to give a pair of glasses to someone in need for every pair sold. It turned out, though, that customers weren't as motivated by the mission as the startup was. The experience taught Blumenthal some important lessons about honing your company's message. --As told to Christine Lagorio-Chafkin

When we started, we had a very strong point of view about brands in general--and of course in particular our brand. When we would start talking about the branding we'd created, it was very deliberate. But it was still verbal diarrhea.

We'd get in front of an editor or a writer and we'd just talk. We'd do a desk-side at Vogue, and bring our collection of frames and a bunch of photography from our first shoot, but there was so much that we wanted to get out around building a lifestyle brand, about our price point, and how we were selling by going online directly to consumers. The fact that we had this home try-out program. That we had "buy a pair, give a pair." The dynamics of the industry. We were so excited to tell that story. But it was a long one, and multifaceted. If we spoke for too long, our audience's eyes would glaze over.

Rather than eliminate messages, we chose those that were more important to customers and emphasized them first. We sought the input of our [Wharton] classmates to understand what was most important to them as consumers, through focus groups and surveys. What we learned is that style and fit come first; glasses are one of the few accessories people wear on their face, so it's natural that customers want to look and feel their best while wearing them. So, fashion and design came first for us.

After style and fit come value and customer experience. Customers want the highest-quality product for their price point, and at Warby Parker, this means selling \$95 glasses made with premium materials that are traditionally sold for hundreds of dollars, all while providing amazing customer experiences. Third comes our Buy a Pair, Give a Pair program. While customers certainly love the fact that we give back, at the end of the day, it's not a critical factor in deciding whether to buy a pair of glasses.

We used to have the "buy a pair, give a pair" on the front page of our website. Now it's just on the social-mission page. Unfortunately, that page gets updated the least frequently, because it's not viewed as much as the homepage or the gallery page and the product page or checkout. Instead of incorporating the program into our checkout flow, we began including an insert card in every customer order that explains it. Within our retail locations, we don't incorporate physical fixtures like artwork or signage that reference Buy a Pair, Give a Pair. And as we introduce new social media platforms, style continues to take precedent.

But, frankly, the social mission is what drives us. It's what gets us up in the morning. It's what prevents us from hitting the snooze button and spending another 15 minutes sleeping. And for our 1,800 current employees and for people that we're recruiting, we lead with social mission. That's the No. 1 reason people want to come work for Warby Parker.

To date, we've distributed five million pairs of glasses to people in need around the world. And that is something we are super proud of. I think we're going to try and be louder about the program. Not because we think it will sell more glasses, but because we think it will inspire other entrepreneurs and executives to invest more in mission-related work. Our hope has always been to demonstrate that you can build a high-growth company that's profitable, that provides exceptional value to customers, and that does good in the world.

We want to be that example that other folks can follow. We need more business leaders to be considering the impact of their products on all stakeholders, and we need leaders to be thinking about that impact in a much more sophisticated way. ■

It took the 'Shark Tank' star a long time to see email as the enemy it is.

Barbara Corcoran Doesn't Reply to Emails. Instead, Everyone Gets This Brilliant Auto-Reply

Barbara Corcoran doesn't have a minute to waste. She's up at 6:30 every morning and kicks things off with a fairly regimented routine. She described how she gets it all done recently for *The Cut*. Most of her morning is focused on her daughter. By 8:05, the Shark Tank millionaire has cooked her daughter breakfast, packed her lunch, and made sure she's ready for school. (Family is important to Corcoran, so much that she asks prospective employees about theirs in interviews. It's how she weeds out complainers.)

Then it's off to races. With a jam-packed day, there's one major nuisance that Corcoran just can't be bothered with. She hates email. "With email, the whole world comes across at you, and it's terrible," Corcoran told *The Cut*. "I don't know why it took me so long to see the enemy as clearly as I did."

Step one to taking control of her inbox? Corcoran took her work email off her phone. This move could be anxiety-inducing for some, because that would just mean all those emails would be going unread, waiting in your inbox, magically multiplying the way unread emails seem to do. But Corcoran doesn't stop there. She goes so far as to let people know not to bother her. It's all in her auto-reply, which goes to every single recipient who sends her an email.

Thank you for reaching out. I'll not be answering your email, but if you would please forward this to [my assistant] Emily, or if you need immediate attention, please call her at the office.

Corcoran still has personal email on her phone. If a business email really needs her attention, her assistants will forward it to her personal address. She says she used to get between 700 and 800 emails a day. The day before the interview, she received only three.

I know exactly what you're going to say, because I thought it, too. I'm not Barbara Corcoran. I'm not worth a reported \$66 million. I don't have an assistant, let alone several. I can't just delete my inbox and delegate managing the whole thing to someone else. But what you can do is manage the amount of time you spend with your email inbox. From turning off notifications to reducing how often we check our email from every three seconds to a few times a day, better email habits could serve us all better.

Here's what's especially important, and what you can take away from Corcoran's email liberation approach. If you do try out a more extreme form of email management, take a page out of her book. It may be worth drafting an auto-reply that gives recipients a head's up about when (or in her case, if) they can expect a reply back. Here's why hers works well.

1. She doesn't apologize.

Even if you do eventually get back, there's no need to apologize if it takes a few hours or even a few days. Consider slashing the "Sorry for the delayed reply ..." from your email vocabulary. Don't set the expectation that it's abnormal to take a little time to reply.

2. It's nice, but direct.

Corcoran has opted out of one of the most important communication channels in today's working world. Everyone else emails. Why shouldn't she? If written differently, Corcoran's auto-reply could come off as snobbish or rude. Instead, she is gracious and to-the-point. She thanks the recipient, then tells them what they need to do if they want to get in front of her.

3. It doesn't leave people hanging.

We live in a high-volume 24/7 email world. People are glued to their screens and may expect you to be the same way. Communicating to people that you're just not gonna play that game is important. Otherwise they might think you fell off a cliff -- or just feel extremely slighted or pissed off.

Get ahead of it. Let people know that you're going off the grid for a bit or that you'll be checking email less frequently. Depending on the nature of your work, you may want to give them an alternate way to contact you for urgent matters like your cell phone or personal address.

Or, once you've made your millions, send them to your assistant. Bai will be a big part of that change. ■

One reason for Netflix's success: It throws the rule-book out the window.

Netflix Avoids Rules Like the Plague. Here's What It Does Instead

Rules. Most employees hate them. And I bet right now you could name a bunch of stupid rules you've encountered in your workplace. But companies need rules to ensure quality and performance, right? Not according to Netflix.

In his new book, *Great Leaders Have No Rules*, best-selling author Kevin Kruse cites Netflix for its remarkable success over the past two decades. Usually, as companies grow, they need rules to protect quality and consistency. But while Netflix has managed to change its business model multiple times (from a DVD delivery company to a streaming company to a content creation company), it has maintained a fiercely loyal customer base by doing the opposite: Netflix avoids rules like the plague.

Back in 2009, Netflix released its now-famous culture deck, which has now been viewed millions of times. In it, company leaders acknowledged the traditional logic for rules and the short-term benefits they bring. But it goes on to show how, over time, a culture that is obsessed with rules and processes drives out high-performing employees.

“When the market shifts quickly due to new technology, competitors, or business models, rule-driven companies can't keep up and lose customers to competitors who adapt,” writes Kruse. “In such an environment, slow-moving, rule-oriented companies grind ‘painfully into irrelevance.’”

In contrast, Kruse explains, Netflix asserts that a business should focus specifically on two things:

1. Invest in hiring high-performance employees.
2. Build and maintain a culture that rewards high performers and weeds out continuous, unimproved low performers.

The result? “Netflix leaders believe that responsible people--the people every company wants to hire--are not only worthy of freedom, they thrive on it,” Kruse continues. “Creating an environment where these individuals are not inhibited by myriad rules allows them to become the best version of themselves.”

In other words, instead of stifling their employees, Netflix uses emotional intelligence to inspire them. Here are some examples of what this looks like at Netflix:

UNLIMITED VACATION. Instead of formally tracking vacation days, Netflix allows salaried employees to take as much vacation time as they want, as long as it meets certain guidelines. (Accounting and finance workers are asked to be in the office during the beginning or end of a quarter, for example.)

employees to take as much vacation time as they want, as long as it meets certain guidelines. (Accounting and finance workers are asked to be in the office during the beginning or end of a quarter, for example.) With this policy, the company focuses on work, not hours.

NO FORMAL TRAVEL AND EXPENSE POLICY. Rather than submit reports detailing money spent on mileage, meals, hotel rooms, and office supplies, employees are expected to spend money as if it's their own--and look for opportunities to save when possible. In fact, the company's expense policy is five words long: "Act in Netflix's best interests."

In the end, it comes down to hiring adults--then requiring adultlike behavior.

"Most companies spend endless time and money writing and enforcing HR policies to deal with problems the other 3 percent might cause," former Netflix chief talent officer Patty McCord wrote in a piece for Harvard Business Review. "Instead, we tried really hard to not hire those people, and we let them go if it turned out we'd made a hiring mistake." By empowering its people, Netflix has managed to continue innovating and increasing its market share--while growing to thousands of employees and generating billions of dollars a year in revenue (from over a hundred million subscribers).

Kruse reminds readers that rules are just another way to micromanage. They disempower workers and stifle innovation, creativity, and smart risk-taking. They reduce morale and motivation. In contrast, the ultimate goal should be that your people make good decisions. "To accomplish that," writes Kruse, "they must feel ownership of and accountability for those decisions." So, if you want your people to develop, to be accountable and own their decisions, and to feel empowered at work, throw the rulebook out the window.

Instead, follow the Netflix model: Focus on hiring the best. Set guidelines, not rules. Reward great performance.

Do this right, and you're no longer managing your people. You're inspiring them. ■