

**Life Lessons in Business and Leadership**  
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“Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.”  
Warren Bennis

As we grow and our businesses grow, leaders have the responsibility to assess their organizations, attain an understanding of any problems, and then find solutions. It was Max Depree who, in 1987, stated, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.” If there were ever a time that real leadership is needed, it would be right now. But, for some leaders, they just do not get it and they are causing some of the major problems we are facing today.

Like life, many of us view business as a ladder of sorts. The goal, of course, is to get to the top. Climbing up this ladder involves a lot of learning, hard work, sweat, and listening to those who have achieved where you are trying to go. Some might say this is the “School of Hard Knocks!” This cliché has some merit because no matter what we do in our organizations it will take hard work to climb that ladder! Some of us would like to believe that once we get to the next rung of the ladder our climb is over and we can enjoy our status of successful entrepreneur, expert, consultant, or leader. This is a dangerous mindset. Learning must be a constant and ongoing process. The technological aspects of our economy alone demand that we continuously seek out new information to keep ourselves and organizations current.

Joe Boutte, a dear friend of mine, wrote the following when responding to one of my recent articles: “I look at lifelong learning as a process and way of life that is similar to breathing. We can't live without breathing and we can't live without learning. Our history as a species is a story of learning and building upon the knowledge of previous generations. The pace and velocity of knowledge generation accelerates because of technology, but each day, each of us continues to learn about others, processes, techniques, ideas, history, analysis, philosophy, and an endless list of issues and topics. Even those who are uncommitted to academic pursuits seem to learn something each day. It is incumbent upon us to read, participate in our communities, and make our presence known.”

I encourage you to become lifelong learners not only for your organizations, but for your own happiness. Learning and growing alleviates complacency and makes us all better leaders and followers. Before we can lead, we must first learn how to become followers. Leaders who start each day asking, "What can I learn today?" will be better positioned to help their organizations succeed than leaders who expect to use yesterday's knowledge for today's problems.