

Level 5 Leadership

Achieving "Greatness" as a Leader

What makes great leaders? Is it their courage? Their business acumen? Their expert knowledge? Their ability to organize?

Truly great leaders have a specific blend of skills. But they also possess something else; certain characteristics which are harder to define. If you're in a leadership role, then you've likely wondered how you can move to that "next level," going from good to great leadership. In this article, we'll examine "Level 5 Leadership" – a key idea that explains this. We'll explore what it takes to achieve greatness as a leader, and we'll discuss strategies that you can use to move up to this top level of leadership.

Introducing Level 5 Leadership

The concept of Level 5 Leadership was created by business consultant, Jim Collins. He wrote about it in a 2001 Harvard Business Review article, and published his research in his well-respected book, "From Good to Great."

The concept came about during a study that began in 1996, when Collins began researching what makes a great company. He started by looking at 1,435 companies, and ended up choosing 11 truly great ones. These 11 companies were all headed by what Collins called "Level 5 Leaders."

He found that these leaders have humility, and they don't seek success for their own glory; rather, success is necessary so that the team and organization can thrive. They tend to share credit for success, and they're the first to accept blame for mistakes. Collins also says that they're often shy, but fearless when it comes to making decisions, especially ones that most other people consider risky.

Level 5 Leaders also possess qualities found in four other levels of leadership that Collins identified. Although you don't have to pass sequentially through each individual level before you become a Level 5 Leader, you must have the skills and capabilities found in each level of the hierarchy.

Let's look at each of the five levels in more detail:

Level 1: Highly Capable Individual

At this level, you make high quality contributions with your work. You possess useful levels of knowledge; and you have the talent and skills needed to do a good job.

Level 2: Contributing Team Member

At Level 2, you use your knowledge and skills to help your team succeed. You work effectively, productively and successfully with other people in your group.

Level 3: Competent Manager

Here, you're able to organize a group effectively to achieve specific goals and objectives.

Level 4: Effective Leader

Level 4 is the category that most top leaders fall into. Here, you're able to galvanize a department or organization to meet performance objectives and achieve a vision.

Level 5: Great Leader

At Level 5, you have all of the abilities needed for the other four levels, plus you have the unique blend of humility and will that's required for true greatness.

How to Become a Level 5 Leader

It takes time and effort to become a Level 5 Leader. But the good news is that it can be done, especially if you have the passion to try.

Again, it's important to realize that you don't have to progress through each level in turn in order to get to Level 5. But you do need the capabilities found in each level in order to achieve Level 5 status.

Here are some strategies that will help you grow emotionally and professionally, so that you can develop the qualities of a Level 5 Leader:

Develop Humility

Level 5 Leaders are humble people. So, learn why humility is important, and make sure that you understand – at a deep, emotional level – why arrogance is so destructive. Then ensure that you behave in a humble way – for example, whenever your team has success, make sure that credit goes to them for their hard work.

Conversely, as a leader, you're responsible for your team's efforts, even when things go wrong.

Tip: The 2007-2008 financial crisis showed many examples of how arrogant, self-glorifying, self-obsessed leaders led their organizations to ruin. Much of this chaos could have been averted if appointment committees had recruited Level 5 leaders. Humility matters, including when it comes to recruitment.

Ask for Help

Level 5 Leaders are sometimes mistakenly thought of as "weak," because they ask for help when they need it.

However, learning **how to ask for help** is a genuine strength, because it lets you call upon the expertise of someone stronger in an area than you are. The result? The entire team or organization wins; not just you.

Remember the Guy Kawasaki quote that "A players recruit A+ players, while B players recruit C players". If you're recruiting A+ players, why wouldn't you take full advantage of their skills? (The truth is that if you can recruit A+ people successfully and get the best from them, then you've become an A+ manager.)

Take Responsibility

A top attribute of Level 5 Leaders is taking responsibility for your team's mistakes or failings. So make sure that you take responsibility for your (and your team's) actions.

Develop Discipline

Level 5 Leaders are incredibly disciplined in their work. When they're sure of a course of action, no matter how difficult it is, they stick to their resolve.

If you know in your heart that you're right, then don't let naysayers dissuade you from a course of action. It's always important to listen to differing opinions, of course, but don't let fear be your driving motivator when you make, or change, a decision.

Find the Right People

Level 5 Leaders depend on the people around them. They spend time **finding the right people**, and helping them to reach their full potential.

If you're a leader or manager already, then you probably know without thinking who your best

people are. However, you sometimes have to challenge these assumptions.

Lead with Passion

Level 5 Leaders are passionate about what they do, and they're not afraid to show it. When you demonstrate to your team members that you love and believe in what you're doing, they will too. If you're having a hard time finding passion in your work, then you need to search for the human element in what you're doing.

Tip: Use common sense in the way that you apply this idea.

In some environments – that is, in high-trust, properly-managed workplaces – Level 5 Leadership is something to aspire to, demonstrate and apply.

In low-trust or dysfunctional environments, however, you may need to use Level 5 Leadership more cautiously. Definitely apply the approach, but make sure that you're alert to the "corporate politics" going on around you.

Key Points

Level 5 Leadership is a concept developed by Jim Collins. After several years of research, Collins discovered that all of the great organizations that he studied were headed by what he called "Level 5 Leaders."

These Leaders have a unique combination of fierce resolve and humility. They were the first to own up to mistakes, and the last to take credit for success.

You can work on developing the following skills and characteristics to become a Level 5 Leader:

- Develop humility.
 - Ask for help.
 - Take responsibility.
 - Develop discipline.
 - Find the right people.
- Lead with passion.