

# Leadership lessons from the headlines

Many have watched with shocked curiosity as a variety of news-making events have unfolded in the United States since Donald Trump was inaugurated as president. So, what leadership lessons can we learn from these recent events?

We have said many times the tone of a company is set from the top. Leaders determine the culture of a company, how employees are expected to behave, and how employees are expected to interact with clients, customers or constituents. A company's brand reputation and employer brand are all impacted by how the leader conducts himself.

While many leaders of well-known companies have been making headlines lately for their negative culture-influencing comments — such as Travis Kalanick, CEO of Uber, and Roger Ailes, former CEO of Fox News — no one has been making a bigger impact than Trump.

From his sexist and misogynist comments about women, to his racist comments and policies (whether said under the guise of national security or just to get votes), to his selection of questionable advisors and Cabinet members, Trump has been setting a new tone for how the United States is expected to conduct itself — 140 characters at a time.

Not all leaders are great leaders. To be a great leader, here are some behaviours they must demonstrate:

**Practise humility:** While self-confidence and self-assurance are important in leaders, arrogance and conceit are not. Being humble, being gracious, and giving others credit where it is due — these are hallmarks of excellent leaders. When



**Cissy Pau**  
GUEST COMMENTARY

your ego drives your behaviours and comments, and when you focus on superlatives about how you are “the best,” “the greatest” and “the most,” your actions become focused on you, the leader, and not the results you want to achieve. By taking all the credit when things go well, laying blame on others when things don't go well, and saying no one else can do the job better than you, you create animosity with employees and customers.

**Tell the truth:** When leaders are honest and tell the truth, they will gain trust with employees. Facts are facts and employees will lose faith and trust in your words and actions if they see that your statements are not supported by reality. Employees are smart. They know when you are pulling the wool over their eyes or when your comments are not based on facts. Tell the truth, even if it hurts, rather than making up stories. If you don't know the answer, say so, and then go find the answer. This builds trust and demonstrates integrity.

To avoid losing credibility, don't make up alternative facts, or make

false assumptions or unfounded accusations — as Trump and his advisors did when it came to the number of attendees at the inauguration.

**Inspire employees:** A leader's role is to inspire — to set a vision and to rally people behind the vision. A leader needs to find ways to get all employees onside to work towards the vision, and to develop inclusive ways to operate so employees are inspired to pull in the same direction. Listen to the employees' concerns. Find the commonality between different points of view.

When leaders talk over you to try to prove a point, when they stop listening, when they simply want to show they are right rather than being open, their ability to inspire lessens. When leaders are divisive and try to pit one employee or group against another, it leads to in-fighting, employees step on each other to move up, they leak news to the media, or they post unflattering views of the employer on social media. The leader has divided and not rallied, and she has set a tone and culture of competition, not collaboration.

**Be kind:** The old saying “You catch more flies with honey than vinegar” rings true for leadership. Showing kindness, compassion and empathy makes you a better leader. You can still be decisive and firm, but you don't need to be mean about it. Employees want to work with leaders who respect them, who listen to them, who care about them, who are genuinely interested in their well-being. Leaders who are mean-spirited, insensitive, belittling, demeaning or rude may get the job done, but they have not earned the trust of their staff and will not have

the loyalty and genuine support of those who follow them.

**Own up to your mistakes:** When ego gets in the way of honesty, we have a problem. If you make a mistake, have the confidence to admit it, apologize, and tell people what you will do to make sure it doesn't happen again. Do this because you mean it, not because your PR firm says it's what you should do. If your approach is to blame others and not acknowledge the part you played, employees will lose faith. As a leader's actions set the tone from the top, employees will start to hide mistakes and blame others as well because that's the example being set by their leader.

**Do what you say you'll do:** In all honesty, this is probably the one trait Trump does demonstrate. He is doing exactly what he said he would do. Put America first. Build a wall. Ban immigrants from perceived at-risk countries. Communicate to the American people via Twitter. Unfortunately, doing what you say you'll do, without all the other traits described above, is ineffective.

If you don't like the culture of your company, look at how you conduct yourself. Are you demonstrating the traits that are essential for a great leader to possess? Or are you setting a tone from the top that a less desirable environment is acceptable? Don't make the same mistakes these headline-makers do.

---

*Cissy Pau is the principal consultant of Clear HR Consulting, a Vancouver-based firm that offers downloadable HR solutions for small business. For more information, visit [www.clearhrconsulting.com](http://www.clearhrconsulting.com).*