

Richard Branson, a multi-billionaire and the owner of hundreds of successful businesses, definitely knows a lot about leadership. This famed leader has picked up a pen and paper to share his 40 years of victory, failure, and lessons about the Virgin way to lead others. As you'll see, Branson is not only qualified as a great leader. You'll learn how commendable listening skills, a really generous soul and a passion for fun have all shaped his philosophy of life and intriguing story.

From his early childhood and years as a high-school dropout to opening his first-ever Virgin Records store, you'll witness the experiences of one of the world's most whimsical entrepreneurs and learn that he has never been afraid to do things in a unique way. So sit back and enjoy as Branson himself gives insightful anecdotes about some of the world's most famous brands.

The way Branson was raised helped him become a warmhearted leader.

We take a lot from our parents: their precious time, their attention and even their eye colors. However, there are some things that are less obvious which make us who we are, such as our personality and life philosophy. Richard Branson strongly believes that his approach to leadership comes directly from his parents.

When he was a young boy, Branson regularly visited the local shop in order to buy chocolate bars. He stole small changes from his parents' bedroom to pay for his chocolate addiction. The shopkeeper eventually informed his father Ted because of some suspicions about young Branson and he expected a harsh punishment from his father.

Fortunately and surprisingly, his father was way softer than expected and he did not even mention the theft. All his father did was to disregard his son for a day. Branson escaped punishment but he never stole money from his parents again. Why? The answer is quite simple: Branson knew that he disappointed his father as he understood from Ted's silence, no harsh punishment was necessary.

As an adult and an employer of tens of thousands of people, especially young, Branson followed in his father's steps and tried to be merciful towards others. For instance, when he

was in charge of Virgin Records, he found out that one of his younger employees, a talented Artists, and Repertoire (A&R) person, was stealing records and selling them to other stores. Even though he had every reason to fire him or humiliate him publicly, he remembered his own childhood and his father's compassion.

Therefore, he privately confronted the employee about the theft and gave him a second chance. Possibly moved by Branson's action, the employee never stole anything again. In fact, he benefited the company, discovering several hit artists such as Boy George, the singer.

However, not everyone has a humane attitude like Branson. For example, the US president and billionaire businessman Donald Trump belittled and fired some people on his TV show The Apprentice with great joy. Though it may have entertainment purposes, it still shows how authoritarian many business leaders are.

Fortunately, the Virgin way of doing things is nothing close to it.

The unrecognized secret of business success is the ability to genuinely listen.

When we make a list about must-have qualities of a leader, listening is rarely on the list, usually at the bottom. Instead, we tend to focus on their oration or speaking skills. For instance, two esteemed leaders of the twentieth century, Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy, are both known for their great speeches and oration skills. It is true that Churchill's 'Finest Hour' speech in 1940 and Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 have become legendary moments throughout the world.

However, even though their oratory skills were commendable, Churchill and Kennedy do not owe their success to it alone. Branson believes that these men must have even greater talent in their listening skills. According to Branson, listening is a sorely underrated skill and an important sign found in many successful leaders.

Branson started his habit of listening carefully to others and ardently noting down any interesting remarks of them over forty years ago. When he was a teenager, Branson got the

chance to interview the famous novelist John Le Carre for his magazine, Student. Even though it was old and did not work properly, he usually brought a tape recorder to his interviews. Thus, he began noting down his interviewee's responses to his notebooks. Soon it became a lifelong habit, and nowadays, he has hundreds of notebooks filled with his own and others' remarks.

Branson is not the only one who benefited from listening carefully and note-taking. For example, in the 1990s, when Branson was giving a speech in Greece about his business, a young man caught his attention during the question and answer session. He asked excellent questions but he also listened to Branson's answers carefully and asked follow-up questions, and even wrote down Branson's answers.

That eager young man was simply the son of a wealthy shipping magnate back then. However, these days, he is Sir Stelios Haji-loannou, founder of one of the UK's most successful airlines, EasyJet. According to Branson, a thirst for listening and a passion for note-taking could also make you incredibly successful like loannou.

A successful company is also a fun one.

When you ask someone what their company culture is like, they usually stare at you with a blank face. It might be true that the only time we experience any 'culture' in our office is when we eat yogurt at our desks. However, that is not the Virgin way. In fact, Branson agrees with Peter Drucker, the wise management consultant who once said: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Then the question is what does a successful company culture look like?

Branson believes that it all comes down to seriously have fun, from executives and managers to junior employees. Before Virgin became this huge business it is today, the organization consisted of Branson and his colleagues having a great time in Virgin Records' only shop. They were a group of people who really enjoyed doing this job with their friends who were also their colleagues.

Things got tough sometimes because of hard work and long hours which are part of the equation. Everyone at Virgin worked as hard as they had fun, and this is why Virgin is very successful. Late-night partying is a common event at Virgin. However, it is not the only place for this kind of fun-loving culture as Branson witnessed it himself in other successful organizations. One of them is a low-cost Texas-based airline called Southwest Airlines. For over four decades, the founder of the airline Herb Kelleher has steered the company.

Like Branson, Herb has always tried to insert some fun into his business. For instance, when a competitor of Southwest tried to sue them for plagiarizing their motto 'Just Plane Smart', Herb persuaded the CEO to solve this problem with an arm-wrestle! The cabin staff also has a unique sense of humor and a way to entertain their customers. One group of passengers were surprised by the flight attendants who hid in the overhead bins and jumped out while shouting: "Surprise!"

This may seem silly and unprofessional to others. However, because of this attitude, Southwest is not only a great place to work but also a highly competitive industry. In addition, it is the only airline company in all history to turn a profit for forty years straight!

The brave and the well-prepared are blessed with good luck.

Is it possible to make your own luck? An ancient philosopher said that "luck is what happens when opportunity meets preparation." In other words, you always have to be ready to act when a surprise opportunity appears. To see how these two elements come together, let's take a look at an example from Branson's own life.

The first album that Branson's newly-found Virgin Records released was Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells. Even though the album was very popular in the UK, Branson had a hard time selling it to the Head of Atlantic Records, Ahmet Ertegun, who thought the album would not be popular in the US.

After many phone calls from Branson, he and Ertegun finally sat in his office and listened to Tubular Bells. The film director William Friedkin walked into the office and asked what the music was. Right there, Friedkin decided it would be a perfect soundtrack for his upcoming

movie. That movie was *The Exorcist*, the popular horror film. Atlantic Records bought the album but also the film made it very famous worldwide.

The fact that Friedkin walked into that office at that time and thought the music was awesome was a great piece of luck. However, Ertegun would not have been listening to that album if Branson did not insistently call him to give it another try.

Another important thing for creating your own luck is, of course, courage. Antonio, Branson's friend, was a student at Stanford University. He once randomly started a conversation with a stranger next to him in a cinema queue, who was also a student. They decided to get a coffee together and that is where the stranger told Antonio that he and his friend were thinking about launching a company.

The stranger showed him what kind of a company they were working on. Even though Antonio was puzzled because their research was too technical for him, he thought the idea had some kind of hidden potential. Thus, he decided to give them \$10,000 he had been saving to buy a car. In return, he bought himself a 1 percent share in this business.

Indeed it was a pretty bold move. Some might even say that it was foolish. But that business is known as Google and that stranger was Sergey Brin. Antonio still has his 1 percent share but now it's worth billions of dollars. It was sheer luck that he went for a coffee that day. But that luck would not have meant anything if Antonio did not take a risk and give them money.

Side-track in your journey to a great decision.

Successful decision-making is probably the most important part of being a leader. Branson, the top decision-maker at Virgin, knows that there is no secret formula to always make a good decision. Even though he made great decisions together with wrong ones for decades, he knows that the best decisions usually take time.

However, this has not been the case for Branson for some time. He even admits that he made rash decisions and jumped into opportunities without thinking or researching thoroughly.

For instance, Virgin's decision to enter into the aeronautics industry was the result of a quick and quite instinctual decision from Branson. Instead of doing market research and get help from his colleagues, he thought his gut instinct was enough for him. Therefore, he launched Virgin Atlantic and later Virgin Blue.

Even though these two investments were very successful, Branson's judgment has not always been so farsighted. Another quick instinctual decision from Branson was to launch Virgin Cola in 1984 and Virgin Brides in 1996. Unfortunately, these investments were not profitable at all.

As an experienced entrepreneur with decades worth of success and failure, Branson supports the idea of deliberate side-tracking in decision-making. In other words, when he has to make an important decision, he and his team take as much time as possible to research and try to guess the outcome of that decision. This cautious strategy helped them on several occasions and proved to be rewarding.

For example, several years ago, Goldman Sachs approached Branson and offered him to invest in a little-known financial material. The members of Branson's Virgin Money team wanted him to accept it immediately. Branson, however, had never heard of this commodity and wanted his team to dig deeper in order to weigh the downsides and upsides of investing. Branson politely declined the offer after long research despite Goldman Sachs' persistence.

That little-known commodity turned out to be subprime mortgages, the same thing that blew up the corporate world in 2007 and eventually caused a global financial crisis. In addition, in 2010, Goldman Sachs was fined \$550 million for handing out deceitful or insufficient information to other investors. Branson now knows that Virgin was one of those investors that received insufficient information. Thanks to his cautious behavior and deliberate side-tracking strategy, they did not lose a lot of money and more importantly their reputation in that scandal.

Conventional wisdom may turn out to be an enemy of innovation.

As an innovator, your biggest challenge will be trying to persuade those pessimists that your idea will work. In the sixteenth century, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire Bayazid II wanted to build a bridge across Istanbul's River Bosphorus in order to connect Europe and Asia. The engineers of that day could not make it work. Thus, the Sultan asked an Italian artist named Leonardo da Vinci to design a bridge that he dreamt of.

Surprisingly, da Vinci came up with a brilliant design based on mathematical concepts that he himself were proud of. However, the rest of the engineers did not support him at all and even told the Sultan that the design was bound to fail. Da Vinci's bridge was never built in the end.

500 years later, innovators are still being discouraged by their short-sighted contemporaries. Fortunately, Branson has not let these pessimists hold him back from achieving his dream projects. For example, Branson chose Times Square as a location to open up his first Virgin Megastore. In 1996, Times Square was considered to be scary and many people advised Branson that New Yorkers would not visit there.

In the end, they were wrong. Times Square megastore started to make weekly sales of over \$1 million but also it helped to initiate some kind of renaissance in the whole Times Square area.

Branson proved his critics wrong more than one time. After launching Virgin Atlantic, Branson realized that passengers spend almost 40 percent of their time on the ground waiting in for the departure. Thus, he decided to make this ground experience as luxurious and comfortable as that time spent flying.

Other airlines neglected their passengers on the ground and focused more on the flying part, resulting in offering them only bad coffee. Virgin Atlantic launched clubhouse departure lounges that offered meals, business centers, haircuts, and even massages. Furthermore, these benefits were included in the price of the flight which made Virgin's critics believe that

it would prove financially problematic. However, they were once again proved wrong by Branson.

These benefits of Virgin Atlantic were so desirable that customers of other airlines started to prefer them. Virgin's competitors tried to add classy departure lounges themselves as an answer. Do not let conventional wisdom lead you or stand in your way. If you think your idea is great and will work, continue to pursue it!

The future leaders need to be guided toward entrepreneurship.

Branson is proud to say that the Virgin way is always ready to help the next generation of young people who will one day become our entrepreneurs. Indeed, finding entrepreneurs with potential and providing with them skills they need to succeed cannot be done by the business world alone.

For this particular reason, Branson is calling schools in order to change the way we teach our children, they need to be aware of the potential of entrepreneurship. As someone who dropped out of school at 16, Branson believes that the mainstream education system does not really care about the skills needed for an entrepreneur.

The future entrepreneurs need to take risks, deal with failure and also be courageous to challenge conventional ways. Most teenagers probably have these qualities so if you were to talk to them about it, you would discover their hidden potential.

Many schools believe that teenagers should not be allowed to think freely. These qualities are destroyed in the classroom and they are replaced with the status quo. Kids are encouraged to follow certain rules and be someone they really do not want to. Teachers should work to make them aware of their true potential or indulge their curiosity about what kind of career they want. Instead, they are forced to get the same jobs and professions as their teachers or parents.

The children are forced to study an outdated curriculum. Thus, algebra is more valuable than human emotions and calculus is thought to be more valid than critical thinking.

So, what do schools need in order to prepare children for the future?

First and foremost, entrepreneurs need to give speeches about their work in order to enlighten young people. For instance, Branson was really frustrated about the fact that his teachers talked only about teaching. To enlighten young people about other possible career options, educators need to get in touch with other people who have chosen different paths themselves.

In addition, if you are an entrepreneur talking to young people, make sure to talk about your failures as well as your successes. Perseverance in the face of difficulties is as valuable as being successful in the minds of young people.

The Virgin Way: Everything I Know About Leadership by Richard Branson Book Review

In order to be successful in business, you need to work hard, create your own luck and have the courage to follow your convictions. As a famous and very successful entrepreneur, Branson has learned that doing things differently than others is almost always better instead of sticking to the status quo.

Everyone knows that Richard Branson likes to throw good parties. For instance, all the Virgin staff and associates celebrated the first-ever Virgin Atlantic flight with lots of champagne.

Furthermore, evidence shows that partying is actually good for business. Research shows that being happy helps people to be more creative, productive and motivated. If you want to boost your income, then crack open some beers, turn up the music and more importantly have fun with your colleagues.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/the-virgin-way-by-richard-branson-book-summary/>