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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Entrepreneur, Leader, and Manager | Bruce Yodis

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 16, 1706 as the tenth child of an eventual thirteen children in his family. Because of the large family Ben only received two years of formal schooling before going to work for his father at the age of 10. However, Ben hated the business of soap making, and saw nothing that he wanted to pursue in it. However, he had a fondness for books which finally determined his career. His brother, James, was a printer and needed an apprentice and so at the age of 13 Ben started his printing career. This became the start of his amazing career as an entrepreneur, leader, and manager.¹

Defining a Entrepreneur, Manager, and Leader

Before talking about Ben's achievements as an entrepreneur, leader, and manager we must first define and understand each. An entrepreneur is a person who has possession of a new enterprise, venture, or idea and assumes significant accountability for the inherent risks and the outcome. Entrepreneur in English is a term applied to the type of personality who is willing to take upon his or her self a new venture or enterprise and accepts full responsibility for the outcome. Entrepreneurs are not driven by a need to make money but a need to make their dreams and visions come true. The money is a byproduct of their motivation rather than the motivation itself.²

The definition of manage is to bring about or succeed in accomplishing; or to contrive. The definition of lead is to go before or with, to show the way, or conduct or escort.³ From this we can ascertain that a manager manages and a leader leads. The best way though to understand what each is, is to compare them. Managers have subordinates while leaders have followers.

Managers champion people while leaders champion ideas. Management is about mission and working with others. Leadership is about vision and working with ideas.⁴

Ben Franklin's Accomplishments

Below is a list of some of Ben's numerous lifetime accomplishments. We list these because they will show us how he was an entrepreneur, a leader, and a manager.

- ✚ **Businessman:** He built America's first media conglomerate by setting up printing and newspaper franchises throughout the American colonies. He also created a property insurance company that still exists today.
- ✚ **Citizen:** He formed America's first public library, fire department, and nonsectarian (not related to a religious denomination) university
- ✚ **Scientist:** He discovered electricity which helped drive the Industrial Revolution. He produced the Franklin stove, invented bifocals, conceived of Daylight Savings Time, and was the first person to chart the Gulf Stream.
- ✚ **Author:** He wrote "Poor Richard's Almanac" and his autobiography, which influenced numerous others of today's classic books.
- ✚ **Civil Servant:** As the Postmaster General he revolutionized the delivery of mail by establishing one-day service and home delivery
- ✚ **Politician:** He had an active hand in creating the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the alliance with France, and the peace treaty with England. He was the only person to sign all four documents.
- ✚ **Diplomat:** He negotiated and secured America's strategic alliance with France during the Revolutionary War; an act that helped to secure the eventual victory for the United States.⁵

Ben Franklin as an Entrepreneur

From the list of Ben Franklin's accomplishments we can see that in many of his endeavors he was the first to do it. He founded America's first media conglomerate, public library, fire department, nonsectarian university. He invented bifocals, discovered electricity, conceived

daylight savings time, and was the first to chart the Gulf Stream. He revolutionized mail delivery. He took these enterprises, ventures, and ideas, took full ownership including the risks associated with each, and accomplished them.

His entrepreneurial life began at the young age of 16 when he left home to start his own print shop. By the age of 26 he had built this up until he had created America's first franchise of printing shops. He did it by doing his homework, finding good employees, establishing key relationships, and taking risks. He used these and his free time wisely to create an endless source of entrepreneurial opportunities. One of which was to also create a newspaper franchise throughout the colonies.⁶

However, Ben had a desire, or drive, to create and succeed. He wasn't driven by the money; he saw the money as a means to an end, not the end itself.⁷ This can be seen when at the age of 42 he left his printing and newspaper companies to concentrate on scientific research. His accomplishments show that his drive was not for personal profit but rather for public well-being, prosperity, and happiness; the first fire company, property insurance company, the Franklin stove which helped to slash the cost of heating for families, a library, a hospital, and a college.⁸

Ben Franklin as a Leader

Much of Ben's success can be attributed to the principles he used to guide his leadership. One of these is a principle of continuous learning. Even though he had very limited formal education he taught himself English, French, and Italian by the age of 11. He loved to read and learn, but did not limit himself to just books. He sought out experts on subjects that he did not know much about and learned from them.⁹ He used this principle to learn arithmetic, something that he failed at several times before. This principle shows the leadership characteristics of passion, seeking

truth or knowledge, achievement, and striving.

As a young man he read a book by Plutarch called “Lives A book that is based on the premise that “individual endeavor can change the course of history for the better.” This became a leadership principle that permeated every aspect of his life. This is the reason he gave up his printing company at the age of 42. He said, “I would rather have it said ‘He lived usefully,’ than ‘He died rich’.”¹⁰ And this is what he did for the second half of his life as can be seen from his many accomplishments that helped to improve the life of the general public. This principle illustrates the leadership characteristics of long-term vision, heart, shapes culture, proactive, transformational, and a concern for what is right.

Ben once said, “Declarations of a fixed opinion, and of determined resolution never to change, neither lighten nor convince us. This is a standard that he held himself to and also others. By keeping an open mind, he left himself open to see the changing political climate and to seize opportunities well before others.”¹¹ Change is the essence of a leader.

Ben Franklin was a man that people followed. His autobiography influenced everything from the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie to Dale Carnegie’s “How to Win Friends and Influence People.” He created many first and many followed by continuing on with his creations and ideas. Most of his accomplishments still affect all of us to this day.

Ben Franklin’s Leadership Style

Trying to define Ben’s leadership style is hard because he was a bit of a paradox. He fiercely believed in the power of the individual, but he was a relentless advocate for acting on behalf of the community. He believed in competition, but he never hesitated to cooperate with competitors

when it was in his interest. He could be the most partisan of politicians, and the most accommodating of diplomats. Throughout his life Franklin saw the world and its surroundings not in stark black-and-white contrast but rather in varying shades of gray, and acted accordingly.¹²

He believed he could influence his world and through his actions, he did. Perhaps more than any other Founding Father, it was Ben Franklin who gave us a uniquely American view of human potential – not “What is he?” but rather “What can he do?”. By his words and his deeds, Franklin demonstrated that leaders, through equal combinations of education, risk-taking, open-mindedness, and vision, can create a better future.¹³

So what was his leadership style, it was to always look to the long-term and do what was right for everyone. This is integrity, and when you have integrity people will follow.

Ben Franklin as a Manager

Probably the most obvious of depictions of Ben Franklin can be seen from the Franklin Planners that are named after him. As the owner of a printing shop and newspaper, Franklin was a businessman who struggled with time management. To combat this problem he devised a plan to set a daily schedule with goals and tasks assigned in hourly segments for each day. This is a best practice that is used to guide manager to this day.¹⁴ His leadership characteristic of self-improvement is also seen when he took it a step further. At the end of each day he would ask himself, “What good have I done today?”

He was also the Postmaster General for the US Post Office. To run the post office and succeed, as he did, he had to use his management skills. He wrote of how he acted as a manager and some

of these skills can be gleaned from his autobiography. Blaine McCormick did this in his book titled, “Ben Franklin’s 12 Rules of Management”. These rules are listed below and indicate how he managed his employees or others, as well as himself.

- ✚ Managers rarely start great - finish better than your beginnings.
- ✚ All education is self-education.
- ✚ Seek first to manage yourself, then to manage others.
- ✚ Influence is more important than victory.
- ✚ Work hard and watch your costs.
- ✚ Everybody wants to appear reasonable.
- ✚ Create your own set of values to guide your actions.
- ✚ Incentive is everything.
- ✚ Create solutions for seemingly impossible problems.
- ✚ Become a revolutionary for experimentation and change.
- ✚ Sometimes it’s better to do 1,001 small things right than only one large thing right.
- ✚ Deliberately cultivate your reputation and legacy.

Although these are seen as management skills, to accomplish them the great manager will also need good leadership skills.

He also believed in teamwork. He once stated, “We must all hang together or most assuredly, we will hang separately.” He spoke these words in a room in Philadelphia as the delegates debated the vote for independence, effectively signing their own death warrants and committing the colonies to struggle and an uncertain outcome.¹⁵ He believed these words for managing the country and his businesses.

Out-Of-the-Box Thinking

As can be seen from his life, Benjamin Franklin did not follow the norm. He was always looking for ways to improve himself, his business, and the way of life for the general public. When you

seek to improve, you can't stay in the box with your thinking, otherwise, you just end up recreating what already exists or not getting anything done. You have to be like the restaurateur, Danny Meyer, who always asks himself "Who ever wrote the rule...?" whenever he seeks to do something new.¹⁶

Perhaps Benjamin Franklin asked himself this before many of his accomplishments. Who wrote the rule that you must go to school to become highly educated? Who wrote the rule that you can't deliver mail directly to a person's home? Who wrote the rule that you can't expand your business into a franchise? Who wrote the rule that we have to stay under Britain's reign? It was this type of out-of-the box thinking that made him so successful.

Emotional Intelligence

Ben Franklin wrote about 13 virtues he strived for. On the personal side, he strove for temperance, order, resolution, frugality, moderation, industry, cleanliness, and tranquility. On the social side he strove for silence, sincerity, justice, chastity, and humility. These are things he believed in but as he himself tells us, he did not always accomplish them.

He had a self-awareness that helped him to know where he was succeeding and falling short. He strove to always improve himself – thus the purpose of his 13 virtues. It wasn't for others, it was for his own self improvement. He chose these because he believed they were the right way to live and he was aware that these were areas in his life he needed to improve.

He also had a strong drive to succeed, not to succeed monetarily or selfishly, but rather for the good of mankind. He knew that the others were more important to him. He used his skills, knowledge, drive and ambition to further improves the lives of others.

Pertaining to Hospitality

Ben Franklin's life as a manager and leader are very pertinent in the hospitality industry. As mentioned earlier, his inventions and ventures were all geared to improving the world we live in and affecting those who live in it. Isn't that what we as hospitality managers should be striving for on a smaller scale. We are not going to affect the world like Benjamin Franklin did, but we will touch the lives of people who either come to our establishment or work in our establishment every day. We should strive to improve their life in that time in some way just through our hospitality towards them.

If the mission statement for my resort that I own and operate is the following:

“At Encender de Nuevo Resort and Spa our goal is to provide an exceptional hospitality experience, in spectacular surroundings, by delivering quality service in an atmosphere of comfort, relaxation, and friendliness – a place to relight or rekindle the spirit. In support of this mission we are committed to:

- Satisfying and exceeding the expectations of our guests by actively responding to their needs now and in the future.
- Providing a safe and enjoyable working environment for our staff.
- Providing a framework of employee involvement, teamwork and open communication.”

Then, I need to use the leadership and management skills that are learned from Ben, to make this a place that improves people lives – making it a place where people can rekindle their spirit. I learned from Ben that doing the small things is more important than doing one large thing – it's the details that will affect people's lives.

Most of his 12 rules of management will also relate to how I deal manage and lead my staff. If I follow those rules, they lead to integrity in life and business. He teaches me not just to be a manager to manage people, but to be a great manager who leads his people. My motivation should not be just to make money, but rather to become a better me while making the lives of others better.

Endnotes:

¹ Mary Bellis, "Benjamin Franklin and His Times: The Birth of Benjamin Franklin", http://inventors.about.com/cs/inventorsalphabet/a/Ben_Franklin.htm

² Entrepreneur, 2010, <http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/term/159078.html>

³ Rosa Say, "Management vs. Leadership: Power up your vocabulary!", November 20, 2008, <http://sayalakai.honadvblogs.com/2008/11/20/management-vs-leadership-power-up-your-vocabulary/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ George Amber", Learning from the life of Benjamin Franklin", 6-30-2007, <http://www.thepracticeofleadership.net/2007/06/30/learning-from-the-life-of-benjamin-franklin/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Blaine McCormick, "Ben Franklin: America's Original Entrepreneur", 2008, pages XIII -XIV

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ George Amber", Learning from the life of Benjamin Franklin", 6-30-2007, <http://www.thepracticeofleadership.net/2007/06/30/learning-from-the-life-of-benjamin-franklin/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jack Uldrich, "Benjamin Franklin's Extraordinary Leadership", Fall 2005, <http://www.leadertoleader.org/knowledgecenter/journal.aspx?ArticleID=83>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gerry Czarnecki, "Ben Franklin: Leadership Guru?", <http://www.articlebiz.com/article/15148-1-ben-franklin-leadership-guru/>

¹⁵ Art Petty, "The Fourth of July in America", July 1, 2009, <http://artpetty.com/tag/ben-franklin/>

¹⁶ Danny Meyer, "Setting the Table", 2006, pages 97-110