

# Want To Be a Better Leader? Learn To Let Go of Control

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This counterintuitive tactic will make you a better leader.



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For decades, we've equated leadership with controlling our teams, our employees, and the direction of our companies. But in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world, clinging to control is the quickest path to failure. In fact, the most important thing you can do as a leader might just be letting go and trusting those around you.

But before you book a one-way ticket to the nearest beach and set your OOO auto-response, let me ask you this: Do you actually have control now? Between the challenges of remote and virtual work, integrating AI into everyday work processes, ongoing employee engagement and retention efforts, and everything in between—do you really have control, or are you wasting time and energy clinging to the illusion of control?

## **A new kind of leadership**

Organizations have—for the most part—moved away from the traditional authoritarian mindset of leadership. Most of us will (hopefully) agree that's a good thing. Read any article on leadership or browse a few posts on LinkedIn, and you'll be inundated with ideas like servant leadership and transformational change. Today, there's an emphasis on empowering our teams. We know that getting diverse perspectives and creating equitable workplaces are good for people and good for business.

Gone are the days when organizational leaders managed by walking around. In a world where teams may not even work in the same country—let alone the same office—authentic leadership is about trust. The trust that your team is doing the work and have the ability to solve problems. The trust you have in your hiring process—that you've chosen the right people to do the right work.

Your employees can tell when you don't trust them. When you don't trust someone, you check up on them. You micromanage. You've got a tight grip on the process, and you can't let go. And when you do trust someone? You let go, and in the process, you give up control.

## **Trading control for trust**

What does control even mean in a modern organization? We've created terms like VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) and BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible) to demonstrate just how variable and unreliable work life can be. After all, no matter how tightly a leader grips the reins, we live in a world of inherent uncertainty.

Perhaps it's natural, given that uncertainty, for business leaders to try to retain some kind of control over a shifting landscape. But the truth is, we can't work to empower others while simultaneously steering teams in the direction we've already decided to go. We can't hold town halls and then dominate the conversation. We can't survey our employees and then ignore suggestions because they don't align with our (very narrow) vision.

So how, exactly, can we trade control for trust?

### **1) Practicing ambiguity**

Embracing uncertainty is not easy. Like any other muscle, the ability to tolerate uncertainty develops through repetition. A low-stakes way to get started is by experimenting with new practices like scenario planning, which can help you rethink how to respond in a variety of situations where you don't have control.

### **2) Techniques for empowerment**

Empowerment isn't something you can decree on official letterhead. You, as a leader, have to actively work to empower others. Coaching services for the delegator—or the delegatee—can make it easier to get in the habit of empowering others and delegating responsibility when it matters most.

### 3) Mindset shifts

Losing control doesn't have to be a handicap or a hindrance. It's a step in the right direction. With the right mindset, not knowing what lies ahead can be a freeing experience rather than a terrifying one.

### 4) Embrace vulnerability and humility

The cumulative knowledge of a team is so much stronger than that of any individual—even if you are at the top of the org chart. Embracing that humility, and sharing it through vulnerability, is the fast track toward exchanging a desire to control for a deeper level of trust.

Leadership is about so much more than control—to the extent that control is even a genuine possibility in our uncertain world. Trust is the strongest currency of leaders. And to gain that trust, you have to learn to let go.