

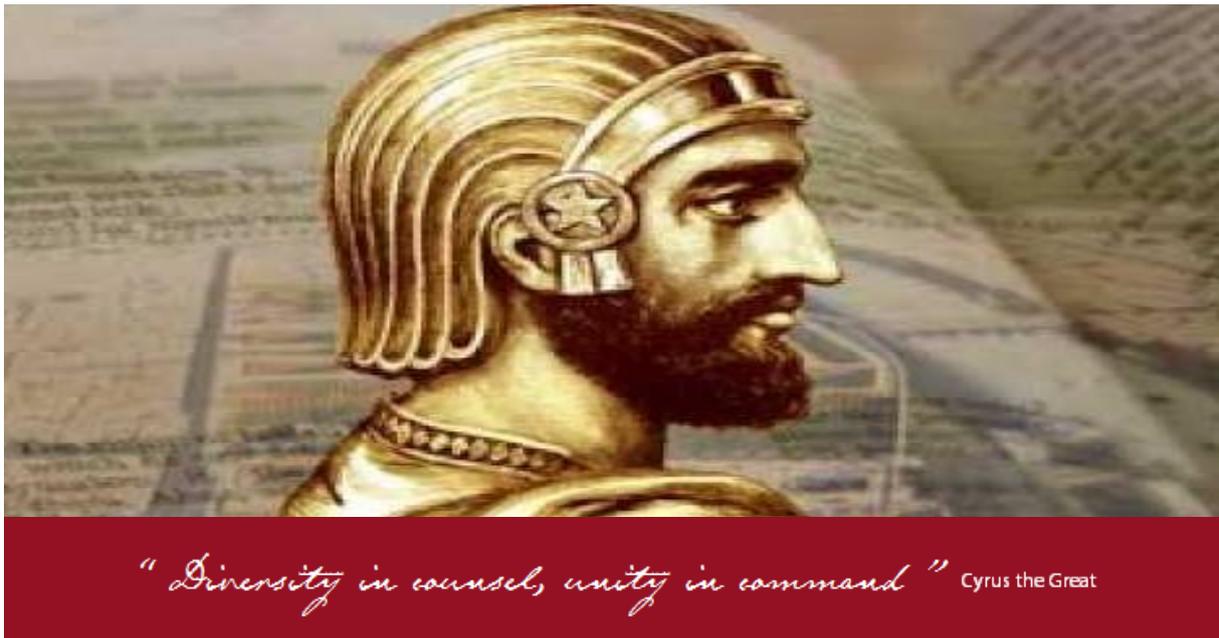


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Executive Search & Board Advisory

11 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE FIRST HISTORICAL GREAT – CYRUS THE GREAT, KING OF KINGS



What we know about Cyrus the great comes to us through an ancient book, the education of Cyrus, by the Greek Philosopher, historian, soldier, mercenary and pupil of Socrates, Xenophon of Athens. The book was supposedly a favourite of Machiavelli, Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson and Montesquieu.

Cyrus was born to nobility in the small tribe, the Achaemenes in central Persia 590 BC and during his lifetime founded the Persian Empire which extended from the Mediterranean Sea and Hellespont in the west to the Indus River in the east. During his lifetime he created the largest empire the world had yet seen. He was given numerous titles, King of Persia, King of Anshan, King of Media, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, King of the four corners and King of Kings. His reign lasted approximately 30 years.

He stands out from all previous leaders and many since as he respected customs and religions of the lands he claimed. Due to his policies in Babylonia, he is regarded by the Hebrew bible as Messiah 'anointed one' and is the only gentile to have been called so.

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He is acknowledged for the achievements in human's rights, politics, military strategy, and influence on both western and eastern civilisations.

In the 1970's, the Shah of Iran supported 'Cyrus's proclamation inscribed on the Cyrus cylinder as the oldest known declaration of humans rights. Some historians have argued in scope and extent Cyrus' achievements ranked above that of Alexander the Great. Iranians have regarded Cyrus as 'The Father', the title used during the time of his reign.

On December 10, 2003, in her acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, Shirin Ebadi said, "I am an Iranian, a descendant of Cyrus the Great. This Emperor proclaimed 2500 years ago that he would not reign over the people if they did not wish it. He promised not to force any person to change his or her religion and faith and guaranteed freedom for all. The Charter of Cyrus the Great should be studied in the history of human rights."

In the annals of history, his reign is seen as exemplary leadership. We have summarised some of the many leadership lessons from Cyrus the Great.

1. Learn from those who came before you

It is a common sense approach. Examine what your predecessors have done, what has worked, failed and why. The aim is to limit potential errors of judgement and why sully, your reputation by misguided decisions when there is the opportunity to learn from history.

2. Lead from the front

Cyrus led from the front. He believed his soldiers, or team would gain confidence from watching their leader lead. Cyrus felt he was able to inspire his army by "stepping disdainfully over the spent arrows and javelins and stones." He called to his men, "Forward now, bravest of the brave! Show me how quickly you can close with the enemy!"

When circumstances are challenging and outcomes unknown, leadership teams rise to the occasion when they witness their leader in front and in battle with them. Being at the front also provided Cyrus clear sight and perspective of the enemy, terrain and as such, allowed them to position their forces to manoeuvre effectively and defeat the competition. It can be difficult to see from behind the pack.

3. Understand that the motivation of your followers is self-interest

"The loyalty of followers comes from self-interest. When they determine that their leader is no longer acting in their self-interest, their sense of loyalty collapses". Good leaders make time to understand their team, they find out what their goals and aspirations are and ensure the leaders goals and the teams are aligned.

4. Don't overpromise and under deliver

Cyrus' father explained to Cyrus "you must never arouse hopes that you cannot fulfil." Leaders who over promise lose credibility. People follow those they can believe in and trust.

Integrity is essential for the leader to succeed. Your team have to believe in you and your judgement.

5. Question the level of hierarchy

Cyrus was unique in that he questioned “distinctions of rank” to exist between leaders and followers. “Living together on equal terms helps people develop deeper bonds and creates a common conscience. Those who live together are far less likely to desert one another in a crisis, those who live apart are more likely to pursue their narrow self-interest.”

Leaders have the common touch, they know without a team they will achieve nothing. They spend time with their executives and create a level of engagement that a tight/rigid structure based on rank may not necessarily achieve.

6. Take care of your team

“Success always calls for greater generosity, though most people, lost in the darkness of their own egos, treat it as an occasion for greater greed” and “we can gain a fortune in that precious stuff called loyalty by being generous to our allies... it will bring us far greater rewards tomorrow.”

Leaders acknowledge and share the credit of success with their team which can be in terms of accolades, visibility, financial payments and career advancement. Cyrus was concentrating on the far greater rewards of tomorrow, that is, the culture and loyalty created to achieve consistent, sustainable and long term success.

7. Create a reason to compete

Cyrus defeated enemies which outnumbered his forces because he motivated his forces, he was passionate about his vision and he instilled confidence in his followers. The chapters of history are littered with stories similar to David and Goliath, where the self-assured outnumbered forces defeated the larger opposition.

A leader in business inspires their followers to dream with them. Entrepreneurs have disrupted markets because they believed in their people, product and outmanoeuvred the larger less agile organisations to steal market share.

8. Don't get emotional

Cyrus didn't make decisions in an act of rage or frustration. He was able to remove his personal feelings and make decisions based on information he had in front of him through rationale and objectivity.

9. Don't stop

Cyrus didn't pause for long before liberating more countries. He knew that once you achieve momentum, it is essential to keep moving as he was very much aware of the hazard that boredom or complacency brings.

As a leader, one of your greatest concerns is complacency. Complacency has been the disease that has ended many iconic brands market dominance. Leaders keep their teams moving forward, they continue to challenge and inspire others to reach new levels.

10. Real innovation

Cyrus broke with all leaders before his time and many since. He ended slavery, paid for work and allowed his followers the freedom to practice their own religion. This was unheard of in antiquity. "Among his many achievements, this great leader of wisdom and virtue founded and extended the Persian Empire; conquered Babylon; freed 40,000 Jews from captivity; wrote mankind's first human rights charter; and ruled over those he had conquered with respect and benevolence." As a leader, he was not afraid to break traditional thinking and the status quo.

Innovation is an overused word and true innovation and thought is rare. As a leader you have to encourage a culture that supports your team being courageous enough to truly innovate and take acceptable risks. If you stand still, the competition will destroy you.

11. Believe in people

Cyrus is known as the Father of Iran for good reason. Unlike rulers before and since who have subdued their subjects, he believed in the good of people, something to this day that stands him out as one of the greatest leaders in world history and why he is worthy of the title, "The Great".

He believed that people on the whole are good, "there is a deep and usually frustrated desire in the heart of everyone to act with benevolence rather than selfishness, and one fine instance of generosity can inspire dozens more."

Gregory Robinson, Managing Partner, Blenheim Partners said, "Cyrus lived over 2500 years ago, his lessons captured in Cryopaedia by Xenophon is full of many great thoughts on leadership and original thinking and one can see why the likes of Machiavelli were so impressed. His ideas are as applicable and important to the leaders in his era as they are for us in ours."

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