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## LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM TRAJAN

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Trajan, also known as Caesar Divi Nervae Filius Nerva Traianus Optimus Augustus with the original name of Marcus Ulpius Traianus was the 13<sup>th</sup> Emperor of the Roman Empire from 98 to 117 AD. Trajan is best known for his conquests as a General which expanded the Roman Empire to reach its maximum extent up to the time of his death. His reign is also remembered for his philanthropy, public projects and enlarged social welfare which benefitted the public.

Born September 18, 53 in Italica, in the province of Baetica now known as Spain, Trajan was the first Roman Emperor that was not born in Italy. Trajan grew up in a family with a strong military reputation. He was a provincial Governor, and became a commander of a legion in a war that Vespasian, a future Emperor was leading against the Jews. When Vespasian became Emperor, he gave Trajan a consulship, and later joined him with the patricians, known as Rome's most noble group in the senatorial class. He became Governor of both Syria and Asia.

At the age of 22, Trajan was classified as a military tribune under his father in Syria. This was where he, as a young officer gained an understanding of the command of men, and the challenges of desert warfare.

After Emperor Nerva died, Trajan became his successor in 98 CE.

Several leadership lessons can be taken from Trajan's rule:

### Perseverance

Trajan's greatest success as a General is demonstrated through his major battles against the Dacians, in which he won three major conflicts. Under Roman Emperor Domitian, Trajan had been involved with the Dacians and King Decebalus, King of Dacia, though had no clear success. He then left Rome in 101 CE to battle the Dacians, conquering them at Tapae, to which they instantaneously sued for peace. Decebalus had to concede sizeable territory, North of the Danube however, Decebalus was never one to obey to a peace agreement. In 105 CE, Trajan returned to the North to battle against the Dacians again. The Roman army advanced the Dacian capital of Sarmizegethusa and Decebalus was defeated.

Though it required two wars, Dacia was finally seized and became a Roman province in 106 AD. This demonstrates the importance of perseverance and not quitting even though we may not achieve what we desire in the first attempt. Such can be applied to business today, as good leaders must remain determined when we have a desired objective in mind.

### Be Innovative

Widely known for his philanthropic rule, Trajan was responsible for the creation of *alimenta*, a welfare program and trust fund to support poor children and orphans in Italian cities. *Alimenta* offered funds, subsidized education and food to children. While the scheme was limited in scope as it was purely for those in Italy, it was a unique and innovative idea by Trajan which proved to be successful as it was continued for a century and a half. A good leader will think outside of the box. They will not only come up with innovative ideas, but ensure they are implemented effectively.

### Create a Compelling Vision

Trajan had a vision for his Empire, to conquer a number of areas in an effort to expand his territories. He successfully extended the Roman Empire, particularly through his conquest of Dacia. Dacia was filled with valuable gold and silver mines, therefore making it an advantageous gain for Trajan and the Empire. Dacia was also proving to be a problem area as it was a safe haven for Roman fugitives.

Trajan's vision also focused on conquering Parthia, Rome's enemy in the East. In 105/106, one of Trajan's Generals seized the Nabataean kingdom, the part of Arabia extending East and South of Judaea. Trajan then constructed a road, known as the Via Nova Traiana, linking the Red Sea with Bostra which later became the capital of the new Roman province of Arabia. In 115 Trajan captured upper Mesopotamia and soon after Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital. Such events further expanded the power of the Roman Empire. Good leaders will always have a compelling vision.

### Treat Those Around you with Respect

During his reign, Trajan worked closely alongside the Senate. He was always honest with officials, advising them of his plans. He treated the Senate with utmost respect. Trajan's open nature allowed him to gain support from politicians and the community, assisting his renowned reputation as an emperor which has now endured nineteen centuries. Trajan's status among his peers was evident as the Roman Senate granted him the title of "optimus," meaning "the best." At the inauguration of all emperors following Trajan, they were honoured by the Senate with the wish "felicior Augusto, melior Traiano" – that he be "luckier than Augustus and better than Trajan". Good leaders will treat those around them with respect, whether it is a lower level employee or the Global Chief Executive Officer.

### Be a Creator

Trajan was a creator. He is known for his public works and building program in the provinces, Rome and Italy, restoring roads and constructing bridges, buildings and harbours. He reshaped the city of Rome, through extending the port of Ostia, establishing a new aqueduct, bringing water from the North and building a public bathing complex on the Esquiline Hill. Trajan also founded the Ulpian Library in Rome. Such public projects significantly benefited the population. Trajan created enduring landmarks such as Trajan's Forum, Trajan's Column and Trajan's Market, to honour his triumphs over the Dacians. Trajan's column was known as his greatest monument, depicting figures of the Romans and Dacians wearing clothing and carrying weaponry which were typical of the era. Surrounding the column, scenes from the two Dacian campaigns are portrayed.

Trajan was a great ruler, effective military leader and conqueror. Trajan has since gained status as the second of the 'Five Good Emperors', by Edward Gibbon, 18<sup>th</sup> Century historian.

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