



3 Lessons From A Jerk of A Leader

Hugh Blane, President of Claris Consulting

I was a jerk of a leader. I'm not proud of it, but it's true. At twenty-seven I got the job of my dreams. I had the title, status, authority, compensation and confidence of the Chairman of The Board and was viewed by the owners as the golden child. I was recruited to lead the company through a period of transformational growth and would be rewarded handsomely for doing so. This job was my big break career wise as well as financially.

The honeymoon lasted for ninety days. On the ninety-first day I was hauled into the executive suite and told that I had ticked off every employee in the corporate office. I may be smart, talented and driven, but if I didn't reverse their view of me in ninety days I was gone.

I was a jerk for one reason. I didn't understand the people side of leadership. I understood and cared about driving numbers and assuring the people who hired me that they made the right decision by hiring me. But, at the time I thought employees needed to get a life, be grateful they had a job and get on board.

Who would want to work for a jerk like me? It turned out no one did. This was the best thing that ever happened to my career. The experience prompted me to write my book: **7 Principles of Transformational Leadership**. Three key lessons I learned twenty-five years ago transformed my leadership, my relationship with employees and my bottom- line results:

1. Intent doesn't matter. Your intent may be as pure as the driven snow, but if your impact is negative all bets are off. People never respond to you based on your intent. They respond based on the impact you have with them. My impact was negative to the



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point that employees went to the owners and said “he’s a jerk and you need to fire him.”

How do you ensure positive impact? Create a “to-be” list. Here’s the key question. What impact do you want people to have when they interact with you? What do you want them to think, feel, believe or know after each interaction? Not having a “to-be” list is the death knell for your success as well as your company.

2. **Mindset is everything.** I did not come into this world with an “I can do anything” mindset. Far from it. At twenty-seven I was prepared to work my tail off to be successful, but felt as though I was driving with one foot jammed on the accelerator and the other squarely on the brakes. Success wasn’t coming fast enough.

In hindsight, my mindset was a poverty mindset. No matter what I accomplished, it wasn’t good enough. My favorite reply to people giving me compliments was, “Yes, but...” I summarily dismissed people because I didn’t believe what I was accomplishing was up to the high standards I had set. My mindset was my greatest enemy.

How do you change your mindset? You fall in love with an idea, hope, dream or aspiration and do something each day to move toward it. When leaders fall in love with an idea at work they become significantly more successful in virtually any endeavor they choose and cascade their thinking throughout their organization.

3. **Tell The Truth.** Twenty-five years ago I had a mentor who told me the uncomfortable truth. He asked, “Do you want to make a difference in people’s lives?” “Or, do you just want the money? If



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you just want the money, power and notoriety of being the leader of this organization you need to make an exit from the ranks of leadership. Frankly, get out because you're giving leadership a bad name."

The very best way to tell the truth is to have a mentor who tells you the unvarnished truth and helps you to do the same with employees. While most leaders describe themselves as brutally honest, their employees describe them as more brutal than honest. I learned at twenty-seven how to be told the truth and tell the truth in ways that builds trust and respect.

The bottom line is this: leaders must know their impact, must master their mindset and tell the truth to themselves as well as their employees. When they do, they won't make the same mistakes I did and they'll increase their performance.

Hugh Blane is President of Claris Consulting. He is the globally recognized performance expert hired to help organizations solve challenging business issues, strengthen personal and professional relationships, and execute on strategic initiatives faster and more reliably. His clients have included Industrial Credit Union, Seattle Metropolitan Credit Union, Red Canoe Credit Union as well as Sony Pictures, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Pepperdine University, KPMG and Costco. He publishes a top blog on leadership and mindset at www.clarisconsulting.net and is an in demand speaker.