

# What skills do you need to run your own practice?

Anyone seeking to set up their own practice needs to develop these traits

IN ACADEMIC JOURNALS, there has often been a tendency to differentiate between managers and leaders. The former are likened to worker bees – they are the organisers, the budgeters and the controllers, and often the unsung heroes. Leaders, on the other hand, are the charismatic, visionary bees capable of driving change, and they enjoy most of the limelight.

But the traditional manager-versus-leader argument has tended to undermine the value of management, to the point that business academics are now shying away from making any distinctions. Indeed, Harvard Business School professor David Thomas believes that the most effective people are those who have the skills of both managers and leaders.

So what are the crucial attributes required for running a company in today's world? Much depends, of course, on the type of company, its structure and its size, but there are a few traits that will serve any business founder well.

## Communication is a two-way street

Effective communication is one of the fundamental attributes for successfully running a business or a team. You may be a Jeff Bezos, a Jan Koum or a Mark Zuckerberg, but, if you cannot effectively communicate with those close to you and other stakeholders, your business will go nowhere.

Communication isn't just the art of opening your mouth; it's about opening your ears too. Leaders need to be good listeners; they need to be able to receive as well as send.

Your behaviour, actions and decisions are also ways of communicating. Those who run businesses have to learn how to create a consistent message through all of these.

## Ever the pragmatist

Being pragmatic and facing problems head-on is a great skill. Setbacks will happen, at times frequently, but having

the ability to think clearly and show others the way forward is a true test of your ability to run a company. Also, sharing difficulties will often inspire co-workers to take action that will improve the company's situation.

Konosuke Matsushita (Panasonic's founder and chief executive) was a master at this. No one expects you to be perfect or omniscient. Being prepared to own up to mistakes is a powerful motivational tool.

## Know your strengths

Although many have tried, you can't be all things to all people. If you're just starting a practice, concentrate on the areas where you are strong (accounting, finance, IT, sales or marketing, for example) and recruit or consult with people who have the skills you don't.

That may even entail recruiting a chief executive or managing director. This doesn't mean losing control; it's the smart thing to do. Assembling the necessary human-capital resources enables entrepreneurs to increase

their organisation's rate of growth and reduce the risk of failure. Think of Meg Whitman, who helped Pierre Omidyar's eBay become the second-most-powerful e-commerce company in the world.

## Show your soft side

While technical (or hard) skills are key for any business' success, running a business also requires a host of soft skills that are often underplayed – for example, a positive attitude, a good work ethic and emotional intelligence. By combining both hard and soft skills, you can excel as a business person and reap the rewards.

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