

What Oprah taught me about leadership

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*Leadership is big business these days with seminars, self-help books and life coaches selling lofty ideas about how to harness the power to lead, but **Samantha Page, group editor of health at John Brown Media, and former editor of O, The Oprah Magazine South Africa, says Oprah Winfrey's leadership lessons came in the simplest packaging.***



I worked on Oprah Winfrey's magazine for 12 years – six of those as her editor and brand ambassador in South Africa. During that time, she rarely used the word *leadership*, but every time we were in the same room – and even when we weren't – I always knew that I was in the presence of a leader.

Oprah had a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve, the courage to follow her gut instincts and an innate ability to effectively communicate both of those traits to whomever she worked with. When the first class of matrices graduated from the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy – her school in South Africa – she impressed on those young women, and every woman in the audience, how important it was 'to become a leader in your own life'. These are six of the lessons I learnt from her on how to make that happen.

1. Strive for significance and success will follow

Oprah was born in rural Mississippi with the odds of success overwhelmingly stacked against her, but her dream was never to become a millionaire. She understood from an early age that she was responsible for her own life and that her purpose was to pursue the fullest expression of her true self. All of her success came as a by-product of that humble vision.

The lesson: Do fulfilling work, excellently, and it will yield success and happiness and inspire others to do the same.

2. Decisions based on ego will backfire every time

Everybody has an ego, and most people think they can easily recognise an egotistical person, but the ego doesn't always show up as boastful, arrogant or obvious. Ego is any thought, action or intention that makes you think you're something that you're not, that takes you further from who you truly are. Leading with your ego is bad for you and, ultimately, it's bad for business.

The lesson: Leadership isn't about glorifying 'self'; it's about acting with your purest intentions to make your vision a reality.



3. Leverage your strengths; get help for your weaknesses

No leader is meant to know everything. Most people excel in a few key areas and need help with the rest. Surrounding yourself with people who can fill in the gaps in your knowledge and help you to realise your vision is smart – in business and in life. And when you ‘stay in your lane’ and play to your strengths, you remain focused on what you are here to do.

The lesson: Reaching out and asking for help is a strength, not a weakness. There is always more to learn and more to teach.

4. Everyone wants to be seen and heard

After a performance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Beyoncé turned to Oprah and asked: “Was that okay?” Whether you’re a superstar performer, an employee, a client or a business associate, everyone wants to feel grounded and validated. It’s one of the most fundamental human needs, and it deepens the connection you have with others.

The lesson: A good leader gives their full presence to the other person and meets them where they are at that moment.



5. You can start serving exactly where you are

Excellent service to customers and colleagues is not just about what you do. The story you tell about who you are and why you do what you do? That's the narrative that really matters, that really moves people and deepens your engagement with them. Extending your life to others in service will add value to their life and yours.

The lesson: Living a life of service isn't servitude. It's understanding that when you lend your light to one person, they'll shine it on another and another and another. When all is said and done, that's the only thing that has lasting value.

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