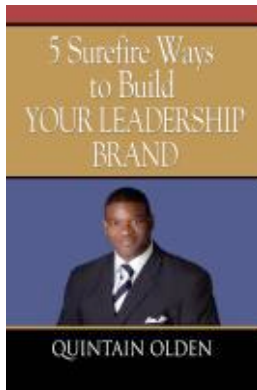


5 Surefire Ways
to Build
YOUR LEADERSHIP
BRAND



QUINTAIN OLDEN



Five Surefire Ways To Build Your Leadership Brand - will show you: • *The three types of leadership styles - and which one is the least effective* • *Why misusing your leadership authority can make you an ineffective leader* • *How to determine if your chosen leadership style will work - or end in failure* • *How to customize your own style of leadership based on your unique personality* • *How to define a clear vision statement and use it as a platform for success*

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**5 Surefire Ways to Build
Your Leadership Brand**
And How to Protect It Forever

By Quintain Olden

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Chapter 3: Take Chances

Go out on a limb. That's where the fruit is. – Jimmy Carter

Now that you have a clear idea of what you want to do and where you want to go, the next thing to do is go forth and conquer. To roll the dice, as it were. It's time to take some chances!

To take a chance means that you will attempt to do something new – something in which there is a possibility of injury, loss or failure. Any time you attempt to take on a new challenge, there is a chance that the results won't come out as planned. I know that sounds scary. But stop and think of all the things we enjoy today because someone else took a chance and risked looking like a fool, or took a major gamble with their money, or even risked their lives. The pages of our history books are filled with tales of great risk-takers. Christopher Columbus (more on him later). The Wright brothers. Joan of Arc. Lewis and Clark. Amelia Earhart. Bill Gates. Rosa Parks. There's just one story of greatness after another.

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What was it about these people that made them successful? Was it that they were not afraid to take a chance? I don't think that was it. Of course they were afraid; they weren't stupid. I think the key to their success was that they were able to face their fears and do what they were born to do regardless of the fact that they might fail. They had courage, they had confidence, they were focused, and they had perseverance.

Consider the story of Jackie Robinson, major league baseball's first African-American player. Robinson was playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in the American Negro League when he was summoned to New York and called into Brooklyn Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey's office on Aug. 28, 1945. Robinson thought he was there because Rickey wanted him to play for a new Negro League team in Brooklyn. Imagine his shock when Rickey and Dodgers scout Clyde Sukeforth told him the news: they were considering giving Robinson the opportunity of a lifetime, to be the player who would make history by breaking baseball's color barrier once and for all.

"I want to win pennants and we need ballplayers!" Rickey whacked the desk. He sketched the efforts and the scope of his two-year search for players of promise. "Do you think you can do it? Make good in organized baseball?"

Robinson shifted to relieve his mounting tension.

“If . . . if I got the chance,” he stammered.

“There's more here than just playing, Jackie,” Rickey warned. “I wish it meant only hits, runs and errors – things you can see in a box score. . . .”

...“Can you do it? Can you do it?” Rickey asked over and over.

Shifting nervously, Robinson looked from Rickey to Sukeforth as they talked of his arms and legs and swing and courage. Did he have the guts to play the game no matter what happened? Rickey pointed out the enormity of the responsibility for all concerned: owners of the club, Rickey, Robinson and all of baseball. The opposition would shout insults... come in spikes first... throw at his head.

“Mr. Rickey,” Robinson said, “they've been throwing at my head for a long time.”

Rickey's voice rose. “Suppose I'm a player in the heat of an important ball game.” He drew back as if to charge at Robinson. “Suppose I collide with you at second base. When I get up, I yell, 'you

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dirty, black son of a..." He finished the castigation and added calmly, "What do you do?"

Robinson blinked. He licked his lips and swallowed.

"Mr. Rickey," he murmured, "do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?"

*"I want a ballplayer with guts enough **not** to fight back!" Rickey exclaimed almost savagely. He paced across the floor and returned with finger pointing. "You've got to do this job with base hits and stolen bases and fielding ground balls, Jackie. **Nothing else!**"¹⁰*

Jackie Robinson took a chance and accepted Rickey's challenge, and the rest is history.

Your mission doesn't have to be as momentous as Robinson's was to be worthwhile. Whether you are thinking of starting your own business, leading your team toward acquiring an important account, or trying for that big promotion, you can increase your odds of success by adding a few essential characteristics and risk-taking skills to your leadership toolbox. Let's take a look at three of them.

¹⁰ "Jackie Robinson Breaks Baseball's Color Barrier, 1945," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005). (Accessed July 27, 2010).

Building Confidence

Head back over to Branch Rickey's office for a moment and revisit Jackie Robinson's dilemma. Can you imagine all the things that went through that young man's mind as he sat there on that hot August day trying to decide whether or not to risk his pride, his career and perhaps even his life by becoming the country's first African-American major league baseball player? No doubt Robinson asked himself more than once that day: *Can I really do this? Will I be able to handle everything — the outright discrimination, the bigoted intolerance, the hateful words and deeds — that I'm going to have to face both on and off the diamond if I take this risk?* Obviously, over the course of Robinson's brief lifetime — he was only 26 years old in 1945 — he had already overcome enough difficulties and built up enough self-confidence that he decided *yes, he could* handle this particular challenge. *Yes, he could* take this chance to try and make the world a better place.

So remember this simple lesson from Jackie Robinson's story:

Confident people are more likely than insecure people to take chances, and to prevail.

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As a leader, you want to be confident and poised under pressure, and you want your people to be the same way. It's your job to instill a sense of assurance and composure in your team members, and you do that by helping them achieve success during times of relative peace and stability. Don't wait until there is a raging fire or some other emergency to find out what you and your team are capable of accomplishing. The Boy Scout motto, *Be Prepared*, applies not only on camping trips! Begin preparing yourself and your team for risk-taking today.

One way to do that is to have practice sessions in which you bring up a variety of challenging scenarios and brainstorm ways your team might handle them. *What would we do if we were to lose a reliable source of funding? Or, what would we do if we lost a valuable team member due to retirement or some other reason? Or, how would we respond if a competitor were to move in on our core market?* These scenarios may not come to pass, but you will still have done something important as a team. You will have practiced working together to solve a problem. And practice makes perfect, because it builds confidence and trust.

My favorite line from the song "Off That" by the artist Jay-Z goes like this:

I'm on the practice field runnin' two-a-days So I don't drop the ball when it's threw my way...

Apparently, even Jay-Z knows that preparedness is a leadership essential. Like a football team practicing drills in the weeks before the first game of the season, you and your people will perform much better under trial and be more successful at taking risks if you are well-trained and prepared. When you practice, whether you're part of a sports team, a symphony orchestra or a business organization, you are working to perfect the fundamentals. Having a firm grasp of the fundamentals frees your mind. When you know the basics so well that they become second nature, it allows you to break away from mediocrity — to reach up and out and strive for something greater. That freedom gives you the confidence to take full advantage of opportunities whenever they knock. And that confidence is what spells the difference between an average team and an exceptional one.

Build Your Leadership Brand by resolving to be a builder of confidence for your team. It's one of the greatest gifts you'll ever give them — and yourself.

Focusing Like a Laser

Andrew Carnegie once said, “Concentrate your energies, your thoughts and your capital. The wise man puts all his eggs in one basket and watches the basket.” Now, I have to admit that this makes me squirm a little. We are usually taught not to put all our eggs in one basket but rather to diversify; to spread out our risk so that we don’t lose it all should something go wrong.

But even though Carnegie’s opinion causes me some discomfort, I believe he was 100 percent correct. If you see a chance you think is worth taking and you’ve prepared yourself as best you can, then *you must make that leap wholeheartedly and without reservation*. You must put the possibility of failure completely out of your mind and ditch any thought of an alternative to this vision. Having a Plan B diverts your attention from carrying out Plan A. It’s just that simple — and it’s just that hard.

I have an old friend, Lisa, who understands this concept better than most. Lisa grew up in a hard-working farm family in America’s heartland. She was the first in her family to earn a college degree, and she went to work as a reporter at the local newspaper after graduation. No one in her family had ever moved more than 100 miles from the family homestead since their ancestors had established it in the 1860s. Yes, Lisa’s roots ran deep — so deep, in fact, that when she announced that she

was pulling up stakes and moving to the west coast to pursue her freelance writing career, her family threw a fit.

“They didn’t believe me at first, not even when I put my house on the market and started getting rid of all my stuff,” Lisa said. “My dad told me to knock off the funny business and get this wild idea out of my head. I told him I wasn’t changing my mind. I was going, and that was that. My sisters even hosted an intervention for me, like I was a teenager joining a cult or something. I was 40 years old, for heaven’s sake!”

Lisa continued carrying out her plan to move and continued trying to convince her family to support her decision. She was certain they’d accept her right to pursue her dream once they understood she was serious about it. Lisa invited her family to join her for a farewell party on the morning she was set to leave, but none of them came to say goodbye. It was at that heartbreaking moment that Lisa realized how strongly opposed to this decision her family actually was.

“I came to the devastating conclusion that if I was going to make this move and live my life on my terms, I was probably going to lose my family in the process,” she said. “I knew that if I pulled out of that driveway, there would be no turning back. There would be no coming home if this move didn’t work out the way I hoped it would. I asked myself if that was a risk I was willing to take, and I decided that yes, it was. It would be an all-

or-nothing proposition for me, and I accepted that. So I dried my eyes, blew my nose, put the car in gear and drove toward my new life with a resolve I might never have been able to muster if I'd had a safety net. Looking back on the whole thing now, I think that was the key to my success. It was the hardest thing I've ever done, and frankly I hope I'm never faced with such a choice again. But was it the right choice for me? Absolutely."¹¹

Here's the takeaway from Lisa's story:

***Your determination to reach your goal
must be greater than your fear of loss or failure.***

Lisa believed in herself and her dream. She had prepared as best she could. Even though she didn't have all the answers at the outset, she was confident in her ability to succeed, and she was willing to put all her eggs in one little basket and then focus on protecting it.

Keeping your eyes exclusively on the prize is not easy. It's very tempting to scrap your goal when things don't immediately pan out like you thought they would. Don't do it! Stay focused! Resolve to make it happen somehow. Feel free to change a failing objective or tactic, but don't give up on your goal.

¹¹ Although it took a few years, most of Lisa's family members eventually came around and accepted her decision.

Whenever you start to falter, remember these words from the classic song “*My Way*,” written by Paul Anka and performed by Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley, among others:

*Regrets I've had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course
Each careful step along the byway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way...*

This leads me to the final thing that I recommend you pick up for your risk-taking toolbox:

Perseverance

Lisa remained focused on her vision even though fulfilling it was much harder than she thought it would be. You must do the same. If you were sure your goal was worthy to begin with, you cannot abandon it just because the going gets rough. Just change your course, that's all.

Think of it this way: If your goal is to drive to across the country and you run into a roadblock halfway there, you don't

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just throw up your hands and turn around and go home. You remind yourself that a cross-country road trip always presents challenges, but you want to go anyway because the rewards far outweigh the risks. You decide to practice flexibility. You accept the fact that in order to get to your destination (your goal), you're going to have to take a detour. You get out your road map and find a new route. And since this new route is going to be a little bit out of your way, you take the time to restock your resources by filling up the gas tank and grabbing some sandwiches and drinks. And then you just keep driving until you get there.

Consider Christopher Columbus, one of the world's greatest examples of a champion risk taker. His goal was to sail across the ocean in search of the Indies, but in spite of his best-laid plans, he underestimated his destination by around 10,000 miles. After four weeks of sailing without sighting any land, his men were getting restless. They wanted to turn back. But Columbus wouldn't hear of it. He urged them on with promises of great riches and glory. Since the sailors believed in their leader, they followed his direction even though they were afraid for their lives. And look at what they accomplished because they persevered!

Of all the qualities a true leader must have, perseverance is at the top. The ability to hang tough and never give up when faced with challenges and failures is an essential ingredient in

any recipe for risk-taking success. Are you a person who perseveres when tested? See how you stack up against these individuals who took a chance on their dreams, and then stuck with it until their dreams came true:

- *It took Thomas Edison 1,000 attempts to create the light bulb, yet when asked what it felt like to fail a thousand times, Edison said, "I didn't fail one thousand times. The light bulb was an invention with a thousand steps."*
- *Henry Ford lost his fortune five times before he finally succeeded with Ford Motor Company.*
- *Although he was cut from his high school basketball team, Michael Jordan continued to practice on his own and ultimately became one of his sport's greatest professional players.*
- *Gertrude Stein's writing was rejected for 20 years before an editor finally accepted one of her poems, and the work of Jack London, author of the classic Call of the Wild, was rejected 600 times.*

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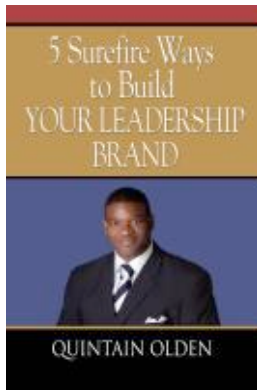
- *A studio vice-president told a young Harrison Ford after his first movie appearance, “You ain’t got it kid... now get out of here.”*
- *Sidney Poitier was told at his first audition that he should “go be a dishwasher or something,” and that he was wasting the casting director’s time.*
- *Walt Disney went bankrupt numerous times before building Disneyland.*

So now you have three things — **confidence, a laser-like focus and perseverance** — that will help you become better at taking chances and also at promoting healthy risk-taking among your team members. Don’t be afraid to lead where no one else has gone before. Don’t hesitate to challenge yourself and your team for greatness, even when others don’t believe it is possible. You don’t have to try to blaze a new trail on each and every assignment, but do be willing to take yourself and your team to higher heights whenever you can. The view is pretty spectacular up there!

And if you’re still squeamish about taking chances after reading this chapter, just remember this final thought:

5 Surefire Ways to Build Your Leadership Brand

***Sometimes, sticking with the status quo
is the most hazardous risk of all.***



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