

# SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

eARTICLE

by Martin Glenn



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This is a free eArticle based on the [eBook](#) and [video](#) of *Successful Leadership in Practice*. It offers key points from the full title – giving you the ability to learn something new about this business topic in just a few minutes while discovering how to get even more from the full length versions.

**G**reat business leaders, those who make the difference between top companies and also-rans, excel at their jobs not just by following the standards set by management training texts. They learn from experience, apply their knowledge and move up the ladder to repeat the feat with ever-higher productivity and opportunities converted into bottom line results. They inspire and motivate teams, focus on results, attain goals and realize visions to create sustainable growth for all stakeholders.

Martin Glenn fits the profile of such a leader perfectly. As marketing director of Walkers Snack Foods, then CEO, and eventually CEO of the combined PepsiCo UK and Ireland, he was instrumental in bestowing iconic status on the Walkers brand – making it one of the best-loved and most successful products in the UK. Today, six out of ten British households buy Walkers crisps at a rate of 12 million packs every day. The lessons he learned and the strategies he implemented have been adopted and redeployed by PepsiCo throughout the world, with similar successes.

Martin led Walkers from a strong regional brand to the number one fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brand in Britain. By 2005, Walkers crisps had a 45 per cent share of the £2 billion UK salty snacks market and had become the UK's most successful high performance FMCG business that, along the way, also managed to double its profitability in just five years. With a strong foundation, built on product quality and a history of slowly building sales and distribution success region by region, the Walkers team led by Martin added a more professional sales and merchandising approach, world-class marketing and further product innovation to the business.

Such achievement doesn't come without recognition. In July 2004, Marketing Magazine voted Martin Glenn the UK's most influential marketer. He was *Marketing Week's* Chief Executive of the Year in 2003 and has been named as a Prince of Wales Ambassador for Education.

Quality of product, sales, distribution and brand marketing are the themes of the Walkers story. But as Martin and the key players involved relate their achievements, lessons in great leadership emerge - lessons that are summarized as follows.

- 1. By far the key role of an effective leader is to place strong emphasis on, and develop skills in, building great teams** starting with the careful choice of team members. Of course individuals should be smart, diverse and know their stuff (people who can really do things rather than just talk about doing them), but you should also include a few sparks in there as well as a contrarian – someone who says it like it is and doesn't mind getting under people's skins from time-to-time.
- 2. Don't try to micro-manage a high performance team.** If you have the right mix of people, leave them to do their jobs and do them well. This includes setting stretch goals but also allowing some 'wriggle room' by setting financial budgets that allow people to make mistakes and learn from them. This contributes to the team's development and provides important lessons for the business overall. And make sure you always **recognise and reward success** while keeping performance visible. That way people always have a clear idea of where they stand against clear goals.
- 3. Always look for new benchmarks.** Find out where you under-perform and define your market accordingly. If you've made it to the top of the tree, it's time to start on the forest. Underpin this by imbuing **a challenger mentality** throughout the company culture. Great teams seem like they are on a mission from God, with a creative restlessness that makes them believe that everything can always be done better. It doesn't hurt to choose an enemy or two either – conflict focuses the mind.
- 4. Businesses that are built to last have continuity at their core** - especially in management. For example, brand management is no longer just about the latest cool ad campaign or sales promotion - it's a discipline that requires 360-degree vision from people with a deep understanding of the brand. Individuals who have long experience with the business will have learned important lessons along the way, applying them wisely in consistently improving strategy, brand and execution standards.
- 5. Great leaders impart an obsession with quality** in every aspect of the business. Quality is a journey, never a destination, so allow yourself to be unreasonable and uncompromising about quality, even if it means making sacrifices in other parts of the business. In Walkers

case this approach led to a virtuous circle that started with quality and continually strengthened the overall business: i.e. great quality fresh crisps sell faster and for a higher margin, which generates higher sales at higher prices, affording greater reinvestment into demand building activity that leads to product selling faster still, making for even better quality product because the consumer receives it fresher.

6. **Make it your business to know your business.** The world is a dangerous place to view from your desk, especially if you are just relying on data. See things for yourself. Make time to get out into the field regularly, talk to people and look for ways to improve and innovate. You'll always learn something and it will elicit many valuable insights that you might otherwise miss.
7. **Great brands don't grow by accident.** The only brands that grow are the ones that are looking to grow. Enduring brands provide solutions for people and transform when the problems they solve need to be re-defined. Stay in touch with the realities of your brand and don't slip into the trap of shaping it in your own likeness.
8. If you want to **get great work from your advertising agency**, remember the adage that *you don't keep a dog and bark yourself*. Agencies are experts in what they do so spend time on your brief, trust your agency with your brand and let them bring it to life. If you really understand your brand and your business, your agency will better comprehend what you're about and communicate your brand messages more effectively. Moreover, if you give them your decision makers (rather than layers and committees) and make an effort to keep them close they'll find even more ways to make you look good.
9. **Visibility is vital to businesses** that sell at retail. Yet it's obviously important for any business that needs to forge and maintain relationships with its customers. *You have to be seen to be sold* and although below-the-line campaigns and promotions may not seem as glamorous as advertising, they are just as important, deserving the attention of your best people.
10. **Keep it fresh and keep moving forward.** Always be on the lookout for new company and product news. Life's too short to be ordinary so take bold steps to keep people talking about your brand and your business. But don't change for the sake of change, particularly under the influence of the 'three Rs' of brand management (Relaunch, Repackage, Resign). The brand manager who is so eager to leave a mark, but not to see through his own operating plan is a dangerous beast indeed.
11. **Engage with every employee.** Even those companies that famously treat their workforce badly still trot out the same old hackneyed phrases about really caring for them. Smart companies know that developing deeper relationships with their staff pays real dividends.

Implement a business education programme that informs all employees about how the business works, how it makes money and why the profit motive is so important to everyone. Share the news good as well as the bad and give employees a real stake in the success of the business. It doesn't just make you feel good, it enhances business performance on all kinds of levels, including improved productivity, employee retention and efficiency.

12. **Build long-term relationships with your trade and supply partners;** don't treat them like outsiders. Be hard but fair and respect the experts while helping them do their jobs by making sure you do yours well. And praise the role of sales, distribution and suppliers by recognising the contribution they make to your growth.
13. **It's not all about profit** – it's about how you do the job to the best of your ability and focus on growth so the profits look after themselves. Although Walkers doubled its profitability in just five years it was a natural result of the way they developed - never an explicit objective.
14. **Corporate and social responsibility is something you have to want to do.** Corporate governance should be about far more than just reining in corporate crime and maintaining minimum standards. We're all answerable to a more discerning consumer these days and that means being a responsible member of society - accepting that our licence to operate is granted by a wider society that judges on the role that companies and brands play. Think of it in terms of opening your doors to the public and letting them look inside every aspect of the company. Would they like what they saw? Look at the bottom line and you'll discover it makes perfect business sense.
15. **Be accessible, highly involved and make yourself available.** The days of traditional management, defined by deference and hierarchical barriers are long gone. Remain open and don't be afraid to show your feelings occasionally. It's an ability still highly underrated in business leaders.
16. **Use market research** carefully. There can be a big difference between what people say they want and what they really like. So when you use market research, don't be like the drunk found leaning on the lamppost. Remember, *it's not there for support; it's there for illumination.*
17. Strategy is stretch. So when you're planning strategy research the hell out of the issue but accept that all decisions have an element of courage in them. Also, **build in the idea of a batting average** - you won't get everything right first time. As long as you maintain a good average by evening out the odd disaster with some spectacular successes you'll win in the long run and learn a lot along the way too.

The above points are taken from *Successful Leadership in Practice*. The story of how Martin Glenn led his team to make Walkers Snack Foods one of the defining business case studies of the last decade and led Martin to be voted the UK's most influential business and marketing leader.

In [Strategic Leadership in Action](#), Martin Glenn shares the insights that led to Walkers' success. He talks about the skills needed to create a great brand and make sure it stays on top, how to lead people productively and shape a business despite the challenges of an increasingly complex business world.

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