



# Jay

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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I read a quote this week from the 19th century American philosopher and historian, Henry Brooks Adams. Adams was the grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson to John Adams, the sixth and second presidents, respectively, of the United States.

The quote: *“A teacher affects eternity; [she] can never tell where [her] influence stops.”*





No big surprise that I immediately replace 'teacher' with 'leader' and further, no big surprise that there is a story behind this...

About a month after graduating from my master's program, on the same day I had two job offers. The first offer was with a residential drug and alcohol treatment hospital for adolescents. The second was with a small employee assistance program start-up. My job was answering clinical crisis calls on the 24-hour call line.

Even though the pay was quite a bit less, the latter offer was intriguing, even though I had very little experience in the business world.

The first couple of months was a lot of phone calls, and a lot of other opportunities. For, as you know, start-ups are all about a 'all hands on deck' type of environment. And this is where Jay comes in.

Jay was my first executive boss. We were small enough that there was the owner in the corner office, and two VPs. That was it. And I reported to Jay.



Very important to remember that I had never taken a business class, ever. Didn't know spread sheets. Didn't know revenue projections. Didn't know HR matters. Did I know anything?!... Jay was patient.

Because as new business possibilities came up ( I still say that it was because I was the next one walking down the hall as they needed someone to do something) I had more and more opportunities presented.

Detailing what those opportunities were isn't the point. It was the fact that I was given them and how I was taught.

Jay was demanding and was a superb teacher. He led by example. I am hard pressed to remember a time that I arrived at the office and he wasn't there already. And I usually saw his car still there when I pulled out for the day.

In one meeting with the CMO of one of the biggest corporations in the west, I was getting thoroughly reamed out due to the poor performance of our counselor network, for which I was responsible. I remember Jay jotting something on his yellow pad and sliding it over to me. At the moment I thought the traditional 'pink slip' had changed color for the day and that I was history. Instead, the words "Don't worry. These are system issues".

I still have the note...carefully saved in one of my leadership folders.



Some of the vital lesson I learned from Jay?

1. Return all your calls the same day
2. Always take responsibility for the outcome
3. Never let work out of your sight with errors, even the slightest typo.
4. Be concerned about people. Take time for them.
5. Never let up.
6. No excuses....ever.

Now, to how this applies to you? I work with one who has nearly one thousand people he leads. I have several who run budgets over \$1B. Most of them are very humble and don't reflect much about this quote or the impact they have:

*"A teacher affects eternity; [she] can never tell where [her] influence stops."*

They don't see themselves as that important. They don't see themselves as Jay, even though I can observe clearly that they are. Sadly, many of them have never been told how they have impacted and influenced those they lead.

So, two lessons here:



1. Realize that you are today, in a position to be a 'Jay' to a very young and inexperienced "Karl". How you lead him or her will affect thousands of people as the ripple effect comes into play. When you assimilate that to your core, your leadership will never be the same. It raises you to a new level.

2. If you have had a "Jay" in your professional life, could you commit to not letting this weekend pass without letting her/him know of the profound impact she/he had and the many that have been benefitted as the effects of the teaching and leadership filtered through you?

To close with the words of Sir Isaac Newton, stated centuries ago:

*If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants.*





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