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Top Three Things I Would Do Differently as a Leader

What three things would you do differently as a leader?

That was the question posed to me from a good friend of mine, Three years into our business, we had more than fifty team members and were on pace to have more than \$18 million in revenue in year four. It was a wild ride but I left knowing that I had made numerous costly mistakes. So when he asked me this question, I had no shortage of things I would have done differently. The hard part was narrowing it down to three.

Within seconds, though, the answers became clear...and surprising to me. They had nothing to do with strategy or specific moments in time. Nothing to do with bad hires or bad financial moves. Nothing at all to do with marketing or our IT infrastructure. Those were easily identifiable areas where we made mistakes and that had tangible monetary losses attached to them.

My three things all go back to the very beginning. As a future leader of the company, I would have done these three things differently.

1. **I would not have become a leader when I did.** How is that for a leadership decision? We went from just three of us (two partners and me) to four other people. Real people with real problems, real needs, and in need of real leadership. And I was the one expected to lead them. Ha! *I was not prepared for leadership.* If I could go back in time, I would have **demand**ed that I not be in put in a leadership role then. If that meant we didn't hire anyone for a while, so be it. If it meant that the owners had to step in and work part-time from our office, so be it. Don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting that I would have stayed out of leadership forever, but when I was a 26-year old punk with no prior leadership experience and no training at all, I was clearly the wrong choice.
2. **I would have gotten a lot of training and passed it on.** If I could go back in time, I would have made sure that all of us leaders would have gotten more training. I would have become a dedicated student of leadership long before I ever became a leader. Instead of struggling to keep up and always working from behind due to the mistakes I had made, I would have made sure I was fully prepared to be a great leader. Then, and only then, would I be in a position to lead effectively and pass it on. I would have made sure we developed leaders around us as well.
3. **I would have gotten help in my personal life in order.** When I assumed a leadership role for the first time, I was a wreck personally and it handicapped my leadership abilities. My anger problems did not magically disappear when I walked through the office doors each

day. My rageful acts nearly destroyed our company early on and nothing short of the hand of God held us together in the first year. If I could go back in time, I would have focused on getting the help I needed then, long before I assumed such a high pressure role. The lesson I learned here is that I should never have waited until my rage had shown up five times or even one time in the office. I should have addressed before it showed up.

When I finished telling him these three things, I explained how these three changes would have impacted everything that happened in our company. We would have spent less time dealing with complaints about me and more time working on the business. We would have developed a culture of leadership and created a much better work environment. What would the results of those differences have been? Who knows? But I have to think it would have helped the business.

The great thing about this is that I will never make those same three mistakes again and hopefully neither will you.

If you could go back in time, what are the things you would do differently as a leader (at work, at home, or anywhere)?