

The Secret to Strong Leadership is Understanding Why the King is the Weakest Chess Piece

By: June Tan - CEO, Intellitrain Pte Ltd

(MBA, LLM, LLB (Hons), GCMC, DipTesol, Certified NLP Practitioner)

Often as entrepreneurs, we are advised that we won't succeed without having first failed. This to me is somewhat simplistic. I believe that it is not the failing that prepares us for success but the willingness to learn, sometimes hard, lessons from our failures.

I recently read a most enlightening article by a now-successful entrepreneur who, after facing 2 business failures and was about to embark on his third venture, recounted his mentor's simple but invaluable advice - that the reason for his continued failure was his insistence in thinking he was smart. Elaborating, his mentor explained that because the entrepreneur thought himself so smart, he tried to do everything himself. The mentor's approach was that by admitting he was not so smart, he had no choice but to surround himself with the smartest people he could find in order to succeed.

This advice struck a resounding chord within me. As a product of Singapore's educational system and having grown up immersed in her culture of excellence, I have always judged myself by the academic yardsticks of having the best grades, coming in top of the class and winning awards. Ironically, this was the mindset that for many years prevented me from even embarking on my own business. For a long time, I felt I would not succeed in business because I never seemed to know all there was to know to be the best in business. Even after years of paying my dues as an over-achieving employee and realizing that there was no such thing as being "the best in business," this mindset continues to be one of the stumbling blocks that I grapple with constantly as the leader of my own business.

To become a successful business leader, you need to learn to loosen the attitudinal shackles of having to be the best and smartest person on your team. Personally, I find the analogy of the game of chess to be a most helpful guide to becoming a good leader. In particular, let me share 3 lessons:

1. No Chess Piece Can Win the Game on its Own.

Think about it, whether you are the king or the pawn, it is a concerted series of moves driven by a higher strategy that ultimately wins you the game. This logic cuts two ways.

As the king, don't think yourself too important or others less important. I take great offence at bosses who say that everyone is dispensable. I don't subscribe to this sort of thinking. As the leader you must put together a team that you believe is special to win the game. And because you as the leader know the outcome you desire and the role each team member plays towards achieving that end result, you must treat each person as special because of the unique talents that they bring to your chess game.



If you think you are a pawn, ask your boss what your role is in the overall game. If he or she can't tell you or makes you truly feel as unimportant as a pawn, perhaps you might want to reconsider whether this team or this game is the one for you. A true leader recognizes the contributions of every member of his team towards the overarching strategy, no matter how small the role might be.

2. As A Leader, Think Yourself Weak and Surround Yourself with the Strong.

Socrates espoused "*And in knowing that you know nothing, that makes you the smartest of all.*" Leaders should not think they are so special or smart. Once they do, they often develop a sense of infallibility that leads them down the lonely path of trying to do everything themselves and taking credit for everything.

When I say "Surround yourself with the strong", I'm not referring just to your team. Successful network marketers have a common formula - they seek out others who are successful and learn from them. This is the sort of humility that took some time for me to embrace and that more of us in business would do well to adopt.

3. Free Yourself to Look at the Big Picture & Prepare for the Outcome You Want to Achieve

This is a natural advantage that follows from learning lesson 2. Once you surround yourself with the best and the brightest at what they do, not only are you able to take a step back, view the game and plan how to win it, you are then able to leverage on the ready talents of your team to do so. Unless you invest the time to build up a strong team, having the greatest strategy is worst than worthless. After all, who will be there to help you when it comes time to execute?