



How Power Leaders Achieve the Impossible

The economy doesn't have to limit you. Here's how to think big even in the midst of hard times.

By Stephen Long

Succeeding during a recession is the ultimate test of leadership. Many believe it's impossible. But consider how much the following industries have *grown* since the start of the present economic downturn:

- movies: 22% increase
- personal care: 18% increase
- video games: 14% increase.

History has proven growth occurs during tough times. Kellogg's, Proctor & Gamble, and Chevrolet all grew their businesses during the Great Depression to become market leaders. General Electric, Disney, Hewlett-Packard, and Microsoft were all recession-era start-ups.

The current downturn will form the climate for the next generation, and executives who leverage their personal power will position their organizations for the future. Leaders who wish to grow their organizations during the recession have two requirements: They must have bold ideas, and they need to act fast.

Speed and scope aren't the only key factors. An essential leadership component is the use of *power* versus *authority*. Distinguishing between power leaders and authority leaders during a stable economy can be difficult because executives rarely reveal their authentic nature under favorable conditions. But in uncertain times, they can't hide

their true colors. Authority leaders rely on their position to preserve the status quo, whereas power leaders engage with their workforce and markets to stimulate growth. They convince their employees they can achieve the impossible and meet market demand even during the most challenging times.

Focus on Change

Achieving the impossible is about change—leading it and getting people to accomplish it. Authority leaders make the mistake of putting every detail in its place and controlling all aspects of a complex organization. They rely on logic and lin-

The time has come for a revolution in leadership.

ear thinking, which leads to reasons *not to do*. Power leaders think creatively and systemically, generating solutions about *how to do*.

Keep the focus on change, not complexity. Set the direction, find the right people, align them appropriately, and show them how they can achieve the impossible.

Alter the Reality

Achieving the impossible starts with deciding what the impossible is. Power leaders share a future that's creative yet practical, challenging yet feasible, focused yet flexible. As they synthesize mar-

ket forces, client expectations, and competitor moves, it becomes clear that the impossible is actually mandatory. Within a moment of clarity, the impossible becomes the reality.

People are apprehensive during a recession. When change is introduced, they tend to protect their current condition rather than moving purposely forward. Power leaders get ahead of the curve by overriding people's short-term fears with long-term stability.

Assess the Risks

Fear and anxiety paralyze authority leaders, keeping them from seeing opportunities. They procrastinate until the decision is made for them by competitors or the market. If they sense the slightest possibility of failure, they decide not to take the risk.

Power leaders, however, take action the moment the reality becomes evident. Sound, valid information is the foundation for every effective decision. Guarantees don't exist, and power leaders accept the risks associated with the future they wish to create. They understand the probable outcomes and consequences of each option considered. They know *who* is going to do *what* and *when* it's going to be done.

Use a Pragmatic Approach

Power leaders don't offer *perfect* solutions; they offer the most appropriate solutions in the required time period. A half-right decision

in a timely manner is better than a perfect decision made too late. The driving factor in decision-making is knowledge, and every interaction is an opportunity to generate information.

Authority leaders let emotions such as fear, greed, or relief drive their beliefs. Power leaders, conversely, understand emotional cycles and create a consistent framework within those ups and downs. They stay calm, emphasize steady effort, and look for the truth within their markets, realizing that it may contradict their current strategy.

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Authority leaders, concerned with survival and acting from theory rather than data, focus on how their services should fit into their market strategy. They actually criticize their customers for not responding to a strategy rather than uncovering what the market truly wants.

Build an Apple-Tree Organization

Throughout history, people have been conditioned to accept hierarchies. We learn to obey parents, teachers, and bosses. We're rewarded if we adhere to the rules, and we're punished if we don't.

In essence, we live in a Christmas-tree world, in which organizations are shaped like pyramids. Christmas-tree organizations are authoritarian and inorganic. Life is good at the top, but toxic intra-competition exists in the middle. Productivity is supposed to come from the bottom, but it's difficult for people to perform with the weight of the organization on their backs.

In apple-tree organizations, leaders occupy the organization's center rather than the top. They inhabit the tree trunk, where they're able to reach up to support producers and middle managers or dig into the roots to access resources. Middle managers are branches moving resources from leaders to producers, working collaboratively and openly with each branch. The producers

HOW THE TWO TYPES OF LEADERS DIFFER

Power Leaders	Authority Leaders
• Focus on Change	• Focus on Complexity
• Alter the Reality	• Cling to Reality
• Assess Risks	• Avoid Risks
• Pragmatist	• Perfectionist
• Apple-Tree	• Christmas-Tree
Organizational Structure	Organizational Structure



are at the top, where they get all the resources they need for high performance.

Several other differences exist between apple-tree and Christmas-tree organizations. First of all, power leaders, stationed at the center of the apple tree, act as gateways to change by listening to the workforce. Authority leaders, on the other hand, have information filtered to them through the Christmas tree's many layers. They're isolated from the truth, which limits the pace of change.

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Second, apple-tree organizations let leadership flow throughout, whereas authority sits at the top of the Christmas tree. It takes expansive leadership to create organizational change.

Finally, apple-tree organizations engender healthy, productive relationships, while Christmas-tree organizations are filled with angry, apathetic, anxious employees. Authority leaders manipulate people's fears to drive temporary, erratic results, compared to power leaders, who apply empathy, intelligence, and wisdom to drive enduring change.

Create a New World

The most important priority for leaders is recognizing that followers won't commit to any initiative through authoritarian means. Executives can't lead change if they apply the same top-down management

style that has restricted employees for centuries. The time has come for a revolution in leadership.

Apple-tree organizations create changes in processes and systems without instituting an expensive reengineering effort. In effect, an organization's culture changes without moving a chair. Redefining excellence and striving for the extraordinary doesn't include risking the organization's future; it only requires a shift in the leaders' mindset.

People resist being controlled. They want to accomplish something meaningful. They want to achieve the impossible, and power leaders help them make it happen. ■

Dr. Stephen Long (DocLong@LevelSixLeadership.com) is the president of The Institute for Level Six Leadership (www.LevelSixLeadership.com), a management consulting firm specializing in leveraging human capital, and author of Level Six Performance: A Gold Medal Formula for Achieving Professional and Personal Success, published by SourceBooks (www.sourcebooks.com).

How You Can Become a Power Leader

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