

## Components of Great Leadership: Team-Building, Willingness to Change, and Celebrating Failure

By Michael Seereiter, President/CEO, NYSRA

*“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.” — Maya Angelou*

Organizations that have traditionally supported the employment goals of people with disabilities find themselves in a rapidly changing environment – one that necessitates different kinds of leadership skills.

### Great Leaders Are Actually Great Team-Leaders

Despite our tendency to glorify single individuals as leaders, the truth is that most leaders lead great teams and rarely act alone. No one is good – let alone *great* – at everything. Therefore, the importance of attracting and investing in highly competent people who take initiative cannot be understated. Once teams are assembled, great team leaders involve their teammates in the decision-making process. Leaders have a responsibility to coordinate and manage their team’s efforts, pulling on the various strengths of those on the team at different times. In fact, good leaders know not only how to take charge, but also how to step back and make room for others on the team, with different strengths, to lead. One thing is for sure – from the leadership team, all other opportunities arise. Without the team, you’ve got little more than luck.

In leading their teams, good leaders also lead by example. Frankly, we would be better served to be wary of those leaders who talk about how great their leadership is, and concentrate more on emulating great leadership when we witness it in action.

### Sailing The Seas Of Change

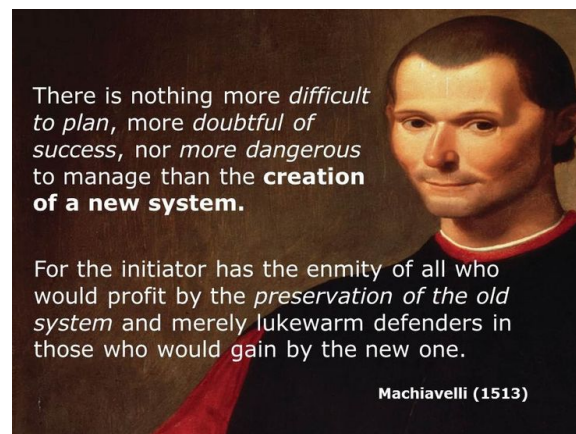
Machiavelli’s system change quote from 1513 reminds us that changing things up isn’t always easy – in fact it’s usually not. Leaders have a responsibility to look out for changes that can impact their organization and the people they support, perhaps most especially when the environment is comfortable, easy, profitable and seemingly sustainable. But, when the winds and



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seas of change are

detected, leaders have an ethical responsibility to use their experience and skills – and those of their team – to direct



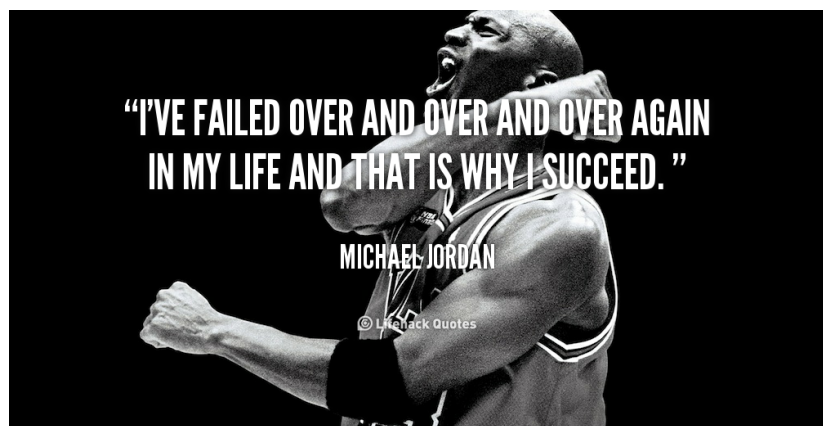
their organizations from the relative calm of a false harbor into turbulent seas in search of safe harbor. And leaders must remember, no one person can sail their vessel alone – it takes an entire team.

### Failure IS An Option; In Fact, It's Likely...

Starting a new venture is admittedly risky business, with statistics on the number of businesses that fail every year ranging from alarming to downright terrifying. Leadership requires the willingness to take on reasonable amounts of risk. Great leaders make the determination about what constitutes a reasonable amount of risk with heavy involvement from their team.

Of course, failure can actually be catastrophic, and even well-intentioned and well-planned efforts can fail. Organizations that are ill-prepared for the possibility of failure often fail due to failures of their leadership – failure to create a cohesive team that actively participates in decision making, failure to plan for contingencies, and failure to have sufficient diversity in the projects/efforts/endeavors.

On the flip side, for organizations that are nimble, prepared, and flexible enough to modify their approach, failure can be celebrated. Perhaps this is the point at which leadership skills are most critical – managing a team's ability to admit failure, learn from it, and move on. Not only does failure offer invaluable experience that can inform a team's planning in the future, but failure also offers the opportunity to redeploy resources to efforts that continue to hold promise. And should they avoid failure, these organizations and their leadership teams can enjoy rewards few get the chance to experience.



Lastly, good leadership requires having the back of those on your team, even when they fail in pursuit of the team's goal. Without assurance that reasonable risk assumed in the pursuit of the team's goal will not be met with punishment, leaders should expect their teammates to avoid all risk, and rarely achieve goals.