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Business leaders can learn from pope

"Be not afraid," was one of Pope John Paul II's favorite sayings, words that should give more leaders the courage and backbone to carry out their mission, says Laura Nash, senior lecturer at the Harvard Business School and co-author of *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*.



Pope John Paul II addresses a Vatican crowd in 1994.

By Claudio Luffoli, AP file

More than four years after the Enron scandal broke, business remains in the throes of corporate scandal. Ethics and moral courage are among the hottest topics. USA TODAY turned to experts for some of the leadership lessons that Pope John Paul II left behind.

Of course, the pope is one tall benchmark. But one quality of a leader is an ability to stretch.

Sacrifice

University of Southern California business professor Warren Bennis, author of *On Becoming a Leader*, says he has never met an exemplary CEO, university president or other leader who hasn't "renounced or abstained from satisfying their personal needs in serving their constituency."

The pope was inspirational even in his own death and the way he handled it with such dignity, says Paul Argenti, director of the Tuck Leadership Forum at Dartmouth.

Be genuine

Intellect is not enough, says Sharif Khan, author of *Psychology of the Hero Soul*. The leader who speaks from the heart usually wins over those who rely on reason alone, he says.

Most people disagreed with the pope on one issue or another, but honesty and caring shone through, says Dartmouth's Argenti. Genuine leaders don't fear popular opinion, and they stick to their convictions, he says.

Stephen Covey, author of *The 8th Habit*, says the pope loved people, which softened a lot of opposition to his positions. The pontiff's warmth and human touch only added to his moral authority, Covey says.

Be courageous

The 1981 assassination attempt demonstrated grave risk, yet the pope did not curtail his world travels. His moral

courage led him to question everything from communism to capitalism, and as he became ill, he exuded an inspiring aura of fearlessness, says James Strock, author of *Reagan on Leadership*.

He took on tough issues without regard to risk, Dartmouth's Argenti says. He apologized to the Jews for the Holocaust; he didn't sway from his positions on celibacy for priests and abortion.

"He stayed with his convictions," Covey says. "He influenced people with his steadfast, stalwart consistency."

"(The Pope) understood his own leadership as historically and religiously important," Harvard's Nash says.

Lead by example

The pope demonstrated empathy, trust, initiative and self-discipline, says organizational behavior professor John Slocum of the Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University. Those are behaviors today's business leaders can emulate, he says.

"John Paul walked the talk," Dartmouth's Argenti says. "He didn't ask anything that he wouldn't have been willing to do himself. He was a doer, not an admin guy who sat around the Vatican giving orders to bureaucrats."

Be knowledgeable

While intellect is not enough, says author Khan, Pope John Paul II had plenty. He was once a professor of ethics, studied literature, was a playwright and a poet, had two doctoral degrees and studied theology during the Nazi occupation of Poland.

He also set aside a lot of time alone for contemplation.

"Pope John Paul focused much of his leadership internally," says Deborah Ancona, faculty director of the MIT Leadership Center. "He was reflective and intelligent and thought about his core beliefs and the actions necessary to live those beliefs."

Communicate

The pope, too, was a great communicator, says author Strock, able to tap into both the church and latent Central European nationalism as he helped bring the Cold War to a bloodless end.

He didn't use a "dignitary tone," but connected to his audience by speaking from "his heart, from the gut, soul-to-soul," author Khan says. "He encouraged (those under communism) not to crawl like animals but walk tall and be not afraid."

Be inspirational

Pope John Paul II was inspirational right up until his death. "We have heard recently that bland leaders lead to better organizations," Argenti says. "Most of us who teach or do research on leadership know that if you can't inspire people and make them feel a part of something larger than themselves, you cannot be effective."

Leaders communicate a vision bigger than one individual but allow each person to understand the importance of the role they play in making the future happen, says Payam Zamani, CEO of Reply and a member of the Baha'i faith, who says he escaped religious persecution in Iran.

"John Paul did this effectively, and his organization was over a billion Catholics," Zamani says.

The pope allowed people to access both his laughter and his suffering, Harvard's Nash said. "He became a living example of an extraordinary generosity of spirit and personal humility."

"Even as he became increasingly physically infirm, Pope John Paul exuded an unmistakable inspiring aura of fearlessness," Strock says.

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BOOK EXCERPTS

Lessons from a Legendary Leader

A new book on Theodore Roosevelt suggests ways decision-makers can learn from the onetime President's exceptional leadership skills

In Theodore Roosevelt on Leadership (April, 2001, Prima Publishing), author James M. Strock examines the leadership qualities that characterized Roosevelt throughout his life and how those same qualities can guide business leaders today. In this adapted excerpt, Strock details Roosevelt's penchant for taking action, even when doing so entailed risk:

Roosevelt's transparent directness fortified his negotiating stance in many situations, imparting the aura of the Big Stick. When circumstances imposed an indirect approach -- direct action was foreclosed -- Roosevelt would respond accordingly. A memorable example occurred in 1907.

TR's premature withdrawal from consideration for the 1908 presidential nomination, combined with the loss of congressional supporters in the 1906 midyear election, emboldened his adversaries. Among them was a group of Western congressmen, embittered by the president's unprecedented conservation policies, which removed or restricted millions of acres from private development. They passed an amendment to curtail the president's ability to set aside additional national reserves. Roosevelt found himself in a quandary. He felt compelled to sign the agriculture appropriation to which the dreaded amendment was attached (there was no option of a partial veto). He remained committed to major expansion of protected lands. The president had ten days in which to decide how to handle this troublesome legislation.

At the suggestion of Gifford Pinchot, his close ally and head of the Forest Service, Roosevelt decided he would sign the legislation -- after annexing an additional sixteen million acres of forest reserves.

Roosevelt later recalled, "The opponents of the Forest Service turned handsprings in their wrath; and dire were their threats against the Executive; but the threats could not be carried out, and were really only a tribute to the efficiency of our action."

From the comfortable distance of a century, hearing that congressmen "turned handsprings in their wrath" elicits a smile. Such things are far from us now. We know how things turned out, who was proved right, at least by our lights. But then it was different.

A leader who takes the initiative not only has the advantages of the first mover; he must also accept the likelihood of greater controversy and criticism. Roosevelt recognized this reality. He wrote in his *Autobiography*:

If I were on a sail boat, I should not ordinarily meddle with any of the gear; but if a sudden squall struck us, and the main sheet jammed, so that the boat threatened to capsize, I would unhesitatingly cut the main sheet, even though I were sure that the owner, no matter how