

VALUES OF LEADERX

1. Autonomy
2. Freedom
3. Relationships
4. Fun and play
5. Experience

If your environment shapes you, then naturally it will impact the way you think about life, your values, your core beliefs and even your attitudes. I have found five common values that shape this generation, which bundled together makes a really awesome leader. As more LeaderXs step up, we see a positive ripple effect impacting our work and lives. Each value on its own is changing how business is done, but when they are brought together, I am certain that LeaderX will deliver exactly what is needed in a disconnected and lonely world.

Being different and being a disruptor isn't easy – that is leadership in a nutshell. I know it sometimes feels easier to go with the flow, yet every time you choose comfort over discomfort, fitting in over following your beliefs and values, you lose a little bit of yourself. I know, I have done it myself. Standing up for what you believe with integrity is never easy, but not doing it means living against what matters to you, and that is far worse. I remember talking to a retiring high-ranking police official about his experiences. He shared that he now

looked in the mirror and didn't recognise who he was anymore. He could track back each choice he made that was in conflict with his integrity: each policy he had been forced to introduce, each member of staff he had punished and each promotion he had taken. Each time he had chosen comfort and self-preservation over doing the right thing, and now he didn't like the person he had become. That is the cost of compromise. So, no matter how hard leading from within in, it's easier than being someone else's puppet.

1. AUTONOMY

'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will.'

—Charlotte Bronte

It's no surprise that when I work with X-Gen clients they all say they want more decisiveness, ownership, accountability and empowerment from their teams. They are tired of having to do all the pushing and know there is an easier way, they just don't know how to get it. What they are really speaking of is their value of autonomy.

You see, LeaderX is autonomous by nurture. They know their own mind, their strengths, weaknesses and they know when to make decisions alone (and take full responsibility for the fall out of those decisions), and when to get advice. Their sense of autonomy means they lead with authenticity and integrity. They expect others to be the same, which sometimes creates frustration and impatience and a lot of friction.

WHY IS AUTONOMY IMPORTANT TO LEADERX?

The 'latch-key generation' were raised to be autonomous. With a shift in attitudes that saw both parents working, it became normal for parents to pursue their own interests and fulfil their own dreams. Boomer parents split their time between friends, hobbies, work and family and X-Gen kids simply slotted in. Xers scheduled their own lives, got themselves to school, prepared their own food and didn't have anyone reminding them to do their homework. They grew into self-reliant, independent adults who took personal responsibility for their lives. Naturally, they often felt detached, sometimes unloved and wanted a little attention or recognition from their parents, but it wasn't there. When they achieved something brilliant, albeit small, they came home to stressed-out parents who didn't have the time, energy or patience to celebrate their little wins. So, they learned resilience and a sense of self-recognition. Fast-forward another decade and it's quite a stark contrast to the Millennial upbringing, which seemed to overcompensate for the stand-offish parenting of the generation before and shifted to child-focused parenting.

LeaderX entered the workforce at a time when a job for life was coming to an end. With the mass restructuring of organisations being commonplace, the message from employers was 'you'll have to take responsibility for your own success'. This generation took that advice and became the most self-reliant generation of recent years. They aren't afraid to craft their own destinies and careers on their terms, hence they are the most entrepreneurial generation – setting up businesses,

not just side hustles. In fact, data from the 2018 US Census Bureau shows that the average age of a business founder was 42, and in 0.1% of top-performing businesses, the average age of the founder was 45.

HOW AUTONOMY AFFECTS THE WAY LEADERX DOES BUSINESS

1. EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES

The leader who values autonomy gives it to others, and that is brilliant in terms of results. Research shows that when employees are empowered to make decisions over their work, engagement and employee satisfaction rises. This is music to the LeaderX's ears. The knock-on effect is often reduced employee turnover, more happiness and motivation and increased performance. The culture of an organisation is the biggest influencer on how people feel, and LeaderX knows that when they walk the talk and become role models of empowerment, they can transform any organisational culture quickly. This is exactly the impact I am seeing out there in the real world.

My story: autonomy

Because I am highly autonomous, I have never been a micro-manager or failed to delegate. If anything, I was guilty of over-delegating, but no one ever failed to rise to the challenge. They grew in knowledge, confidence and loyalty and, as a team, we all succeeded.

At one point in my career, I took on a new managerial role, and during my handover with the previous manager, she explained that the monthly sales performance report was the most important output of the team, and therefore, it was my job to do it. She handed me a huge process document and tried to train me on Microsoft Access.

I politely yet assertively stopped her right there. I explained that I would never be running this report, that was not my job. I would be delegating it to the team of analysts who knew the data, the systems and would love the opportunity to improve it. Needless to say, that's why she was leaving, and my team would go on to become the subject matter experts on all things sales, performance and analysis.

2. BETTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES

When you take full responsibility for yourself, you not only see all of your brilliance, but you also see your weaknesses. It's humbling. LeaderX knows that they don't have all the answers, so go out of their way to get ideas and solutions from others. For an independent thinker, it could be easy to build a fortress around you, real or metaphorical, but LeaderX knows that this is really harmful, leading to isolation and tunnel vision. A fortress might seem safe, but it cuts you off from relationships, connection and so much rich and valuable insight and information. It breeds toxic behaviours and groupthink. I have worked with leaders tucked away in an executive wing of the office, who only venture out when a business briefing is required, and then shuffle back to their fortress. LeaderX has learnt to break down their fortress

and let people in – they are free thinkers with the confidence to make decisions, yet also seek counsel from others to expand their perspectives and growth.

LeaderX stays in their lane, not stepping on the toes of experienced peers, giving competent and highly skilled Boomers accountability and ownership. At the same time, they purposefully encourage accountability as they coach and support Millennials. They unlock their talent and give them the freedom and autonomy to develop.

Top tip: balance autonomy in relationships

You can still make the final decision after engaging and canvassing ideas. Walk the floor of the office and engage in impromptu conversations, ask questions and listen so that you understand. Perhaps hold regular town hall-style sessions or forums where you become accessible to others.

3. BETTER TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

X-Gen hates being told what to do because they weren't brought up that way. Instead, they prefer to be given a goal to achieve in their own way, which is normally the quickest and most efficient way too. This usually requires other people and that's why X-Gen value teamwork as much as they do autonomy. As a leader, they like to create a sense of belonging, purpose and direction, then get out of the way so that everyone can get on with delivering in their own unique way.

Autonomy and teamwork might seem like a paradox, but it is as simple as this: when you lead at the intersection of 'me'

and ‘we’, really special things can happen. If you can bring together a group of independent and diverse thinkers who commit to achieving a common goal, the impossible becomes possible. LeaderX values coming together to solve a problem, delegating tasks and responsibilities and then getting out of each other’s way so that people can deliver their best work – independently. They decide the WHAT and let others decide on the HOW.

In reality, this looks like getting the whole team together to discuss the strategy, encouraging healthy debates about priorities and then giving them accountability to get the job done. They seek commitment around the decision, trusting that even if a team member initially disagreed with them, they are now wholeheartedly supporting the direction of the business. X-Gen leads how they want to be led, with autonomous connectivity.

4. LIBERATED TEAMS

If there is one thing X-Gen hates, it’s unnecessary structure and formality. They hate being told how to behave and what to think, so they actively choose to liberate people and teams. They choose to trust others to make the right decision and focus on the right things (projects that link to the business vision). The focus is based on how you behave, the results you bring in, a true meritocracy. They focus on productivity over presenteeism and when you do show up, they are less concerned about what you wear or what you look like.

They proactively encourage diversity in teams to maximise the skills and experience of everybody. 67% of X-Gen leaders are also highly skilled in ‘hyper-collaboration’. Their rebellious nature and refusal to bow down to bureaucracy in favour of informality allows them to break down organisational silos and lean towards more matrix-style working and agile project management. LeaderX continues to support the reporting line manager structure whilst being passionate advocates of independent working, regardless of who they report to on paper.

The ability to form teams of independent people for a short project and deliver is really the strength of LeaderX and we are seeing the benefits today.

HOW AUTONOMY CAN HOLD LEADERX BACK

Whilst being independent has many merits, any overplayed strength can become a weakness. Being too independent can cause all kinds of problems when you are building relationships and can cause stress both for yourself and the people around you.

ISOLATION

GenX needs to be careful that they don’t over-rely on delegation and shouldn’t expect everyone to be accountable. The ‘dump and run’ approach can cause unnecessary pressure on less confident or able employees. It also can turn collaborative Millennials off. Whilst independent thinking is vital, if you rely on your own thoughts too much you might end up setting yourself up for failure and isolation. If you don’t have a trusted group of experts

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around you to be your sounding board and check you are on the right path, it's easy to become a tyrant. I realised that when I was climbing the career ladder. In times of stress, I could easily build a fortress around me and shut people out. I would become attached to my decisions and perspectives, refusing to listen to others. I now know there was a bit of imposter syndrome at play and it only ever ended badly. Although I was trying to retain control, I was missing the challenging debates and idea exchanges. I know I was scary (my nickname was Dragon Lady for a time) and probably a little obnoxious. Like I said before, my mistakes became my biggest teacher.

I notice my mistakes in my client's behaviours too. They are successful leaders, yet struggle to open up and ask for help. Sometimes, it is because they believe that they are always right, but usually, it's because they believe, unconsciously, that asking for help is a sign of weakness. They want to be the expert, the hero, and yet there is no greater strength than asking for help and being vulnerable. That takes real courage.

DEALING WITH OTHERS WHO AREN'T SO AUTONOMOUS

X-Gen is action-orientated and just wants to make a decision, spring into action and get stuff done. They get into trouble when they struggle to understand why others don't want to step up and take accountability too. It's really common to see leaders jumping in, applying pressure or even getting angry with others, often unfairly. It shows up as frustration, interrupting and impatience and is incredibly damaging. All LeaderX really wants is to lead

a group of empowered people who willingly come together as a team and are internally motivated to achieve results. They proactively empower others, enthusiastically coaching and supporting them to be the best they can be, but they need that willingness to be two-way. They don't want to do all the heavy lifting.

Top tips: be a connected autonomous leader

1. Don't shut yourself away. Place your desk amongst your people or remove natural barriers.
2. Eat in the same places as your team and hang out where they hang out.
3. Ride on the same transport or park in the same car park as your people.
4. Invite people in via forums, lunches and participate in regular (two-way) feedback sessions.
5. Speak last in discussions, having listened to everyone's ideas and thoughts.
6. Don't settle for consensus and agreement which leads to mediocrity, instead choose bold action and stand by the consequences.
7. Walk the floor and actively talk to people (and actively listen).
8. Champion and then attend open days, family days, parties and get-togethers – get involved in the activities, don't just simply observe.
9. In times of uncertainty, lean into the team and resist the urge to go inward.