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**Conscious Leadership: Elevating  
Humanity Through Business**

Made by Blinkist



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Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

**What's in it for me? Step up your leadership game and see beyond the bottom line.**

It's common for people to think that businesses exist to do one thing: make money. But this isn't entirely true. When businesses have a higher purpose in mind, they have the potential to not only maximize their profit, but also do good in the world.

For businesses to achieve this, however, they need a conscious leader – one who is willing to step up to a high level of integrity and social responsibility.

In these blinks, you'll discover the qualities that make up a conscious leader, as well as how you can lead your business toward purpose *and* profit.

Along the way, you'll learn

- why we need to change the language surrounding business;
- how to create a conscious work culture; and
- ways to lead your business with integrity.



## Conscious leadership begins with personal transformation.

Let's begin with the story of author John Mackey.

In the late 2000s, Mackey arrived in Florida to meet with the Whole Foods Market board of directors. They were going to discuss his future as CEO of the company – and it wasn't good news.

According to the board, Mackey's work over the past few years had been unsatisfactory.

For example, Mackey had tried to create an online initiative for Whole Foods – WholePeople.com – which aimed to sell everything from healthy food and supplements to books and clothing. Unfortunately, it was a bust. The board had had enough.

After he left the meeting, Mackey felt panic-stricken. Was he about to lose everything he'd worked for?

Mackey might have felt like this was the end for him as a leader. But, in fact, it was just the beginning.

**The key message here is: Conscious leadership begins with personal transformation.**

Mackey wandered into some of the local Whole Foods stores in Florida – as he quite often did when he was traveling. He saw aisles lined with an abundance of healthy, natural food, and a number of happy employees chatting to customers.

This brought him to a realization: making people happy and inspiring them to eat nutritious food was exactly what Whole Foods was all about. It was the reason he had cofounded the company all those years ago.

In that moment, Mackey reconnected to his purpose – his “why” for wanting to lead a business that was driven by something more than just money.

When Mackey met with the board again later that afternoon, he did all he could to prove that he was the person to lead Whole Foods into the new millennium. And he just about pulled it off.

To cut a long story short, Mackey was able to keep his job – but he knew he couldn’t be the same leader he’d been before. If he was going to guide Whole Foods into a bright future, he would need to grow and evolve as a conscious leader. That meant embarking upon an “intentional journey” of personal development.

In the next blinks, we’ll look at the steps you can take to become a conscious leader – including what mindset you need to embody and the qualities you need to cultivate.

But first, let's take a look at the role of business in society – and at how capitalism can be a force for good.



**When it comes to business, profit and purpose aren't mutually exclusive.**

When we think about “business,” many of us imagine big corporate companies monopolizing markets, squashing competitors, and always looking to maximize profits. But not all companies operate like this.

In fact, if you talk to business leaders you'll often find that they're in it for the *purpose* of the business: the meaning it brings to their lives and the value it brings to their customers.

Of course, businesses strive to make money – otherwise they couldn't exist. But, at the same time, the new technologies or services they provide often aim to upgrade people's lives.

**The key message here is: When it comes to business, profit and purpose aren't mutually exclusive.**

Many people have a hard time imagining that businesses have a higher purpose in mind beyond making money.

One of the reasons for this is the way we categorize organizations as either *for-profit* or *not-for-profit*. With this logic, businesses are seen as dedicated to making profit for their owners, or *shareholders*. Meanwhile, nonprofit organizations are, by definition, perceived as not intending to make money at all.

We expect businesses to ruthlessly pursue profit. On the other hand, we expect organizations like the Humane Society or the Nature Conservancy to be driven by altruistic motives rather than a desire to maximize revenue.

The thing is, purpose and profit don't have to be mutually exclusive; a business can make money while also doing good in the world.

This is called *conscious capitalism* – a philosophy created by the author. Conscious capitalism claims that every profit-making activity has the potential of realizing, and elevating, a higher purpose. And when a leader recognizes this, the economic and social benefits of the business expand exponentially.

Outdoor retailer REI is a good example of conscious capitalism. The business rakes in billions of dollars every year, but it's guided by a desire to connect people with the beauty of nature.

One way that REI expresses this commitment is by closing all of its stores on Black Friday – one of the most profitable days of the year for many businesses. Instead of falling over themselves to get customers through the door, REI gives all its team members a paid holiday. It also encourages its customers to “opt outside,” and ditch

the indoor sales for a day of activities in nature.

Businesses can be a great force for good in the world if they are led by a conscious leader with a strong *why*. We'll take a look at how leaders can uncover their business's *raison d'être* in the next blink.



**All business leaders need to discover their guiding purpose – but this might take time.**

Meet Shawn David Nelson. He's the founder of Lovesac furniture company, and he wasn't always guided by purpose.

In fact, in his early twenties, Nelson was just concerned with making the world's biggest bean bag – the “Lovesac” – and having a good time doing it.

But as the company expanded, and the sales of Lovesacs skyrocketed, he realized there was another, more meaningful reason to run the business: he wanted to make furniture that was “designed for life,” using sustainable, recyclable materials. In doing so, customers would be able to keep their furniture longer, which would in turn save millions of tons of waste every year.

**The key message here is: All business leaders need to discover their guiding purpose – but this might take time.**

Every organization has a passionate individual behind it – one that has spent time nurturing inner visions and experimenting with novel ideas. But not everyone wakes up one day with a clear sense of purpose.

For the author, figuring out his purpose in life was simple. At 23 years old, he knew that he was passionate about natural, organic food and people's health. So he channeled this into creating his business, Whole Foods.

Other entrepreneurs discovered their purpose by coming across a problem. Take Yvon Chouinard, the founder of outdoor clothing company Patagonia.

As a young man, Chouinard was an adventurer who cared deeply about climbing and the wilderness – but he

struggled to find the right clothes to wear for his hobby. To solve this issue, he developed an environmentally friendly outdoor clothing line.

So while some leaders arrive at their purpose almost instinctively, others have to take a longer route to get there. But this isn't necessarily a bad thing.

According to the author, purpose is a lifelong practice. It's something you have to discover and rediscover many times throughout your business journey.

One way to identify your purpose is to think about people who inspire you – a practice the author calls “communing with your heroes.” For example, you could meditate on the words of an author whose book changed your life, or think about the story of a person you look up to.

As a leader seeking to become more conscious, it's essential to figure out

what you want to achieve. And you can do this by finding wisdom in those who have walked the path of purpose before.

*“Sometimes we need to walk  
through the wilderness to find a  
sense of direction.”*

**Conscious leaders all have one thing in common – integrity.**

If your company had doubled in size, your shareholders were happy, and your profits were going through the roof, what would you do? Would you carry on the same way, or would you try to do even better?

This is the situation Ramón Mendiola, CEO of Florida Ice & Farm Company (FIFCO), found himself in back in 2008.

Despite having a board of directors that saw no need to change anything about the business, Mendiola knew that things could improve.

However, doing better didn't mean making more money. It meant creating a company that was profitable – but that also lived by the virtue of integrity. This meant satisfying shareholders while

simultaneously trying to do right by the environment and society at large.

**The key message here is: Conscious leaders all have one thing in common – integrity.**

Mendiola was made the CEO of FIFCO back in 2002. And he got off to a good start. Under his leadership, the company improved its efficiency and expanded into new markets. But not everybody was happy about it.

Gisela Sanchez, one of Mendiola's executives, pointed out that the company was growing exponentially. But its philanthropic giving still only amounted to 1 percent of the company's profits. This was a far cry from companies like Microsoft, which were donating around 8 percent.

Sanchez also told Mendiola about the concept of the "triple bottom line." This is where social and environmental

impact metrics are as important as financial results in the accounting of a company's success.

Like any leader with a strong sense of integrity, Mendiola knew he had to revise the way the company was doing business. So he reached out to the company's various stakeholders – team members, partners, suppliers, and NGOs – to ask questions like, “What can we do to be a more responsible company?” and “How can we improve our social and environmental footprint?”

Based on the feedback he received, Mendiola took action – and things changed pretty fast. For example, the company became water neutral by 2012. And they steadily increased their philanthropic giving to 8 percent of net profits within a few years.

Making positive changes to a business relies on having a leader with integrity – one who is willing to admit where the

company is falling short and make concrete steps to address those areas. But having integrity is also about practicing the following qualities: honesty, honor, authenticity, and trustworthiness. We'll take a closer look at some of these in the next blink.



**Honesty and authenticity are traits that every leader should cultivate.**

Did you ever tell small white lies when you were a kid?

Maybe you painted a pretty picture on your parents' lovely cream sofa – and gave your sibling the credit. Or perhaps you ate the last cupcake and blamed the dog. As children, one of the first lessons we learn is to tell the truth. But many of us don't do this enough – even when we're adults.

Being dishonest has far-reaching consequences, especially in the world of business.

**The key message here is: Honesty and authenticity are traits that every leader should cultivate.**

Telling the truth is powerful, but it's not always a comfortable endeavor.

Occasionally, it might mean upsetting colleagues, challenging convention, or rocking the boat in some way. No wonder so many people avoid it.

While few business leaders have this kind of integrity, *real* leadership demands it. We need truth-telling leaders to confront us, challenge our assumptions, and ask us to focus on areas of our lives that we don't always want to examine.

For example, former Medtronic CEO Bill George once told a colleague – who was pretty shy about giving his boss negative information – that “integrity is not the absence of lying.” Having integrity, and telling the truth, can sometimes mean speaking up and saying things people might not want to hear – even if it's uncomfortable.

Another aspect of integrity that's essential to leadership is authenticity. An authentic leader is someone who is the same person, whether they're presenting

to their board of directors or onboarding new interns.

In other words, they don't play to the crowd because they're afraid of what people will think and say. Instead, they stay consistent – and true to themselves.

Authenticity doesn't always come naturally. But it *is* a quality that can be cultivated.

While it sounds like a cliché, being true to yourself involves *knowing* yourself. You have to recognize your own strengths and weaknesses, and take responsibility for their impact on those around you.

This doesn't mean leaders should drop everything and take a “self-help sabbatical.” But gaining a little self-awareness – either through self-reflection or feedback from others – can go a long way.



**Conscious leadership involves pursuing win-win-win situations.**

Have you ever heard phrases like “natural selection,” “survival of the fittest,” and “it’s a dog-eat-dog world” being thrown around in business?

Well, that’s no accident. For years, we’ve been taught that “bloodthirsty conflict” is the fundamental reality of business – and that only the strongest entrepreneurs survive.

These ideas have been capitalized on by the mainstream media too. In the popular CNBC show *Shark Tank*, various entrepreneurs pitch their business to hard-nosed venture capitalists, or “sharks.” And only the best ideas survive the “ruthless competition” to receive funding.

In many cases, the overriding goal in business is to survive and prevail – and

crush any competitors that get in your way. This means there's only ever one winner; everyone else is a loser.

But what if there were an alternative way of doing things?

**The key message here is: Conscious leadership involves pursuing win-win-win situations.**

Leadership today is increasingly complex – especially when you're having to navigate all sorts of relationships and responsibilities, and keep everybody happy.

In business, *win-win* solutions – where you create a positive outcome for yourself *and* the people on the other side of the table – are the most ethical way forward when it comes to decision-making.

For example, a win-win solution could be when a trade happens and both people

do well; one person receives a product they want, and the other receives a gain on the exchange.

Then there are *win-win-win* solutions, which go even further. Instead of just looking for ways to create positive outcomes for those within the business relationship, they find ways to create value for the broader, external community – a third win.

This community can be defined as widely as you wish. For example, the additional win could be for your family, your religious community, your city, your state, your nation – or, if you're really ambitious, the entire world.

So, how can we practice the art of the win-win-win?

Well, when you're about to make a business decision, try asking yourself, "Is anyone losing in this proposal?" or "Does anyone perceive themselves as getting

the short end of the stick?” If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then ask yourself how you, and your team, can collaborate to fix it.

Posing these questions brings clarity to any proposal by helping you identify any gaps – and forcing you to create better and better alternatives.



**For businesses to thrive, they need to invest in long-term opportunities.**

In the years leading up to the financial crisis of 2008, Iceland was in the throes of a *boom-and-bust* cycle.

This is where an economy grows exponentially, creating abundant jobs and bringing high market returns to investors. Then it shrinks, causing people to lose their jobs – and investors their money.

There were a few reasons why this bust happened in Iceland. For starters, everybody was in a frenzy to get rich quick. Instead of thinking about long-term financial stability, companies borrowed cheap money and bought other companies to fuel their growth.

Then, when the economy crashed, this approach of pursuing rapid, short-term profit left businesses in massive trouble.

**The key message here is: For businesses to thrive, they need to invest in long-term opportunities.**

The story of Iceland's boom-and-bust phase contains a really important lesson for conscious leaders: pursuing long-term value creation is better than chasing after short-term financial wins.

To create sustainable prosperity over the long term, business leaders must look to the future, understand the dynamics of change, and invest with a multi-year – or even multi-decade – timeline.

This is an approach that Ron Shaich, founder of the massively successful restaurant chain Panera, has always advocated. By the late 2000s, Panera had achieved remarkable growth, making it a strong competitor to companies like Chipotle and Starbucks.

A lot of this success came down to Schaich's willingness to make

transformative changes and investments that, while challenging in the short term, kept the company creating value in the long run.

Some of the ideas Panera implemented in order to achieve this were: embracing technology, creating a strong customer loyalty program, and developing healthy food products.

So, as a conscious leader, it's imperative to resist the temptation to maximize short-term gains; instead, invest in the future. But how can you master this kind of long-term thinking?

Well, one way is to conduct a “premortem” – an exercise Schaich himself uses. The idea is to imagine yourself on your deathbed, looking back at the you of the present. Ask yourself: “What really matters? What risks are worth taking? And what needs to get created to make the world a better place?”

This exercise can help you clarify future aims and ambitions for your company. And if you do it honestly, the quality of your leadership will reflect this long-term, positive perspective.



**Creating a conscious work culture involves attracting, hiring, and retaining talented employees.**

When we think about the most successful business leaders of our time – people like Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos – we tend to assume they achieved great things single-handedly.

However, behind these talented entrepreneurs are fantastic teams that complement the strengths of their leader and compensate for their weaknesses.

That's why hiring the very best employees, and creating a culture where they can develop and thrive, is critical for the success of any organization and its leaders.

**The key message here is: Creating a conscious work culture involves**

**attracting, hiring, and retaining talented employees.**

This is something that Steve Hall, the founder of the highly successful car dealership company driversselect, discovered firsthand.

Just a few months into founding his business, he realized that the key to creating a thriving organizational culture was to invest significant time up-front on hiring. That meant bringing the best talent on board from the outset – and doing everything in his power to keep them.

When Hall interviews for entry-level positions, he seeks to hire people who will eventually be able to do jobs that are two or three positions up on the corporate ladder. So when hiring a receptionist, for example, he looks for someone who could eventually become an office manager.

Once a new hire is brought on board, Hall invests in leadership training to help this entry-level employee grow and develop within the company. As a result, Hall's staff turnover rate is one-third the industry average.

Other companies also understand the importance of hiring and retaining quality employees. For example, in 2019, Amazon pledged to invest \$700 million toward providing skills-training to 100,000 team members over the following six years.

However, creating a thriving company culture doesn't magically result from grouping talented individuals in a room. As a leader, you'll need to take frequent "chemistry checks" to ensure that members of your team are getting along and working effectively together.

It's a good idea to frequently meet with your team to iron out any issues that might have arisen. Ask questions, like:

“How are people getting along? How high is the trust between people on the team? Is there anyone disrupting morale? And, if so, is there anything I can do about it?”

Creating a conscious culture is about creating an environment of safety, trust, and enjoyment – as well as hard work. As a leader, it’s your job to keep your team thriving if you wish to keep your company on the road to success.



## Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Ultimately, becoming a conscious leader involves embarking on a journey of lifelong learning and growth. Not only do you have to commit to finding your purpose, you also have to live out that purpose through every aspect of your business. This means focusing on creating value for all stakeholders involved: yourself, your customers, your team, and the wider world too.

Actionable Advice:

**Take your foot off the gas.**

It's all fine and dandy being a conscious leader who works tirelessly toward their purpose. But you're no use to anyone if you're burned-out. So if you're feeling tired and unenthused, take a break!

Leave your phone at home, and go and

spend time in nature. Your mind, your body, and your business will thank you for it.

## **Got feedback?**

We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to [remember@blinkist.com](mailto:remember@blinkist.com) with *Conscious Leadership* as the subject line and share your thoughts!

## **What to read next: *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*, by Jim Dethmer**

You've just learned how qualities like integrity, honesty, and transparency are integral to leading consciously. The blinks to *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership* expand on these ideas, offering a road map of 15 things you can start implementing today to elevate your leadership game. These include speaking candidly to others, ending blame and criticism, and not taking yourself so darn

seriously – for the benefit of yourself, your team, and your business!

So, if the prospect of increasing joy, productivity, and employee engagement within your company has piqued your interest, head over to the links to *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*.



**Nice work! You're all done with this one.**

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