

Ken Thomas



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Leadership was a calling for Ken Thomas—one that didn't stop at his first venture. Three multimillion-dollar companies later, he shares some keen insights on success.



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Ken Thomas believes that leadership is a calling.

"At some point, we are all called," he says. "Many people don't accept the call because stepping up can be scary. When you lead, you open yourself up to failure and potential criticism."

Leaders aren't afraid of these failures because they are great teachers. Teachers are what make great leaders, Thomas believes.

And he should know. Thomas answered the call to leadership early in his career. He has owned and operated three multimillion-dollar companies. He's also served as president of the Metro Atlanta Landscape Association; Southeast region sales manager for ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance; and serves on the board of directors of the 410 Bridge, a nonprofit organization working to develop communities in Kenya, Uganda and Haiti.

Today, as founder of Envisor Consulting, and with 30 years of experience in the industry, it would be hard to find someone with as many core leadership skills as Thomas. Learn more about his leadership role models and why he puts leadership books in his children's bathrooms.

Q. How would you describe your style of leadership and why does this work for you?

A. My leadership style has always been one of empowerment. My goal is to empower organizations, teams and my family with a clear vision of success, a solid value system and a core purpose that inspires us to rise above adversity.

I found out a long time ago that people have different ideas of success and how to get there. I realized if I could help develop a common vision of success that a team could buy into and rally around, we would have a much better chance of doing great things together. An effective vision is not vague. It is specific and contains clear goals and accountabilities. Once a compelling vision is in place and we have identified our solid set of guiding principles, the team becomes much better at leading each other in achieving the common goal. Eventually my primary role as the leader is to protect and refine the vision, communicate results to the team and stimulate continuous progress and improvement.

Q. How do you work at consistently becoming a better leader?

A. I believe that leadership is a calling and an honor and, at some point, we are all called. Many people don't accept the call because as the leader we are accountable, and that means you might fail. Nobody starts out as a great leader; you start out by answering the call and making mistakes. Mistakes are great teachers. Leadership, like any sport, requires practice. Great athletes started out as athletes and honed their skills through hard work and by making mistakes. I believe good leaders constantly self-evaluate and strive for improvement. Good leaders never feel like they have arrived.

Q. Who are your leadership role models and why?

A. I have always admired the classic American hero, people like "Stormin Norman Schwarzschoff," great coaches like Bear Bryant and President Ronald Regan, but I also recognize the heroics of everyday leaders like school teachers, moms and dads, and people who step up against all odds and make a difference in others' lives. Coach Wilson, my high school cross-country coach, was probably the first leader who I looked up to. He took an interest in me at a critical time in my life and inspired me to rise above with his kindness and strong value system. Great business leaders who serve with strong values, like Truitt Cathy of Chick-fil-A restaurants, are also great role models.

Q. What leadership book(s) inspire you and why?

A. My mom used to put leadership books in my bathroom when I was a teenager. (Crazy, I know.) She never asked me if I read them, but I did. One of the first was Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People." I read it over and over and still have it today. I put good leadership books in my children's bathrooms as well. I hope it works. Other great books that have had great influence on me include:

- "Good to Great" by Jim Collins – This book has great lessons about servant leadership and building cult-like cultures.
- "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen Covey – This

focuses on mastering yourself and understanding the power of vision and values in life and business and the value of creating win/win relationships.

- “Developing the Leader Within You” by John Maxwell – This is just a great read on leadership principles with great quotes to remember and inspire you as a leader.

Q. In a leadership capacity, where do you see yourself in five years?

A. I hope to continue to help other business owners achieve their greatest successes. I also will continue to work to grow as a father and husband and to model servant leadership in all that I do.

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