

## You Can Get Everything at Amazon - Including These 14 Leadership Principles

Amazon continues to be a force in our culture. In the run up to Christmas 2014 they sold 426 items per second! I just finished reading Brad Stone's fascinating study of Amazon called [The Everything Store](#). I was struck by the 14 leadership principles that Amazon (and CEO Jeff Bezos) operates by and wondered how they might apply to leading in a church. Here are my reflections on the principles ... I'd love to hear yours in the comments!

**Customer Obsession** // Leaders start with the customer and work backward.

- Even a cursory amount of research on Amazon reveals they are obsessed with serving customers. They fixate on crafting easier and better customer experiences — 1-Click Ordering, Prime Membership, Kindles — the list goes on and on! How obsessed are church leaders about our guests? Do we listen to them and try to understand how we can create better experiences? It's humbling to see a retailer so passionate about serving people. Do we at least match that intensity with our important mission?

**Ownership** // They act on behalf of the entire company, beyond just their own teams.

- Once your church grows beyond 200+/- people the [silos and fiefdoms](#) begin to multiply. Departments try to outdo one another with their volunteer thank-you events and swag. We cheer just a little louder when our team does something right. One group of creative communication types may sneer at something that another group does. We need to help our teams ask the bigger question: How are we working to see all departments, campuses, teams, and people win at our church?

**Invent and Simplify** // As we do new things, we accept that we may be misunderstood for long periods of time.

- When was the last time we tried something new? I mean really new ... something that people might think you're crazy for doing. Amazon plays the long game on a lot of its projects and is misunderstood all the time. Some of it has worked (Amazon Web Services) and some of it has bombed (Fire Phone), but they're in the game to grow their business and delight customers. Why don't churches have research and development departments? How can we be misunderstood this year?

**Are Right, A Lot** // Leaders are right a lot. They have strong business judgment and good instincts.

- This is an interesting value for church leaders to consider. Where is the tension between strong leadership and a lack of humility? I've met a lot of amazing church leaders with great instincts but they hold back because they don't want to be perceived as pushy.

**Hire and Develop the Best** // Leaders raise the performance bar with every hire and promotion.

- When you transition from being a solo pastor to a multi-staff church, the most important thing you can do is hire and develop your staff. While I totally believe this to be true, I haven't always lived it out. Like all non-profits, we're stretched for time and energy. Hiring can fall to the bottom of a very long and pressing list. I've been caught (more than once) with the dilemma of hiring too early, thinking "someone is better than no one." It's bit us every time.

**Insist on the Highest Standards //** Leaders have relentlessly high standards, which many people may think are unreasonably high.

- Our mission as church leaders is the most important thing on the planet. There is nothing more important than what churches do. So why do we lack that level of intensity? I've met a lot of church leaders who tolerate incredibly low standards and I think that is the one thing that is holding their ministries back. Building a growing church takes a lot of intense work — emphasis on a lot and intense.

**Think Big //** Leaders create and communicate a bold direction that inspires results.

- You can't out-dream God. 10x your thinking. Don't launch one campus ... ask what would happen if you [launched five in one weekend!](#) Don't settle for having your book published ... [give it away to 30,000 people](#) ... for free! What happens if you fail? You only launch three campuses ... or only give away 20,000 books? Think of the impact.

**Bias for Action //** Speed matters in business. We value calculated risk-taking.

- "Jesus is coming back, look busy." There are seasons in your ministry when you need increased momentum. When people are ready to invite their friends ... do everything you can to encourage it. Don't wait to launch that new student ministry next year ... those kids just keep getting older. For whatever reason God seems to work with those people who are willing to take action. I don't totally understand it, but I do know that faith is a verb and it requires us to participate. Do something ... see what happens ... adjust course.

**Embrace Frugality //** Frugality breeds resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and invention.

- Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos's first desk was made of doors bought from Home Depot and bolted together. He still uses a "door desk" today ... and many of the conference rooms at Amazon have "door conference tables." Spend money where it makes an impact on your guests and cut back on everything else, so you can spend it on your guests. Your offices can be too nice. Your staff party can be too extravagant. Watch your spending and invest in what matters most.

**Be Vocally Self-Critical //** Leaders do not believe their or their team's body odor smells of perfume.

- Love this one! Leaders who believe their own good press drive me up the wall. You'd think this value would be easy for church leaders to live out ... we are all keenly aware of

being fallen and our need for a Savior. However, we do like the smell of our own perfume just a little too much.

**Earn Trust of Others //** Leaders are sincerely open-minded, genuinely listen, and are willing to examine their strongest convictions with humility.

- Trust is earned and not given. It's earned through listening with humility. What process do you have in your church for listening to people who might disagree with you? [Recent scandals in our community](#) prove that there can be an unhealthy culture in churches where leaders don't listen to people around them. In fact, they use spiritual language to silence people who disagree with them. This needs to stop.

**Dive Deep //** Leaders operate at all levels, stay connected to the details, and audit frequently. No task is beneath them.

- When was the last time you actually experienced what it's like to come to your church? (Or any church for that matter?) Being the "first in, last out" gives you a false sense of what it's like. How can you dive deep into the experience that you provide? What do "normal people" experience at your church? How can you use your leadership to make it better?

**Have Backbone; Disagree and Commit //** Leaders are obligated to respectfully challenge decisions when they disagree, even when doing so is uncomfortable or exhausting.

- Some of the healthiest church leadership teams I've seen have serious disagreements. I mean red-faced, passionate disagreements ... not passive-aggressive, stab-you-in-the-back battles. The stakes are super high, so it's understandable that we'll find ourselves on different sides of issues and opinions. If no one is fighting (well) in your leadership team meetings, you probably have the wrong people in the room.

**Deliver Results //** Leaders focus on the key inputs for their businesses and deliver them with the right quality and in a timely fashion.

- What are the results you are attempting to deliver? We all think about noses and nickels — weekend attendance and revenue — but what are your other key performance indicators? How many first-time guests came last month? How does that compare to last year? What is your volunteer attrition rate? Is it going up or down? Numbers matter ... even if you aren't a "numbers person," you need to understand the numbers that show the health of your church.

> [Read more from Rich here.](#)