

# Jet blue leadership

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David Neeleman, founder of JetBlue airline, garnered support for his new airline in part using inspirational appeals directed at investors and politicians, as well as potential partners. He managed to convince skeptics that he could make his idea of a low cost airline work. Some say Neeleman was successful by “sheer force of his personality” (Kreitner, 2005, p. 378). Neeleman’s primary power base of reference as can be seen in the way airline employees view him. Tom Krizek, JetBlue pilot, said, “I would walk through a burning building for him” (Salter, 2004 ¶1).

Surprisingly, this was said after meeting Neeleman only a few hours before. Neeleman has more than just the power of his personality, though. His experience and knowledge of the airline industry was useful when it came to recruiting top employees to JetBlue, as an expert in the airline industry, “his track record served him well” (Kreitner, 2005, p. 379). Using Daniel Goleman’s concept of emotional intelligence (EQ), Neeleman has shown that he has the ability to manage his emotions and behaviors, indicating a high EQ. Neeleman expects to succeed, handles setbacks with ease, and looks at issues with an original perspective.

His ability to relate to everyone from baggage handlers to key investors and charm them all is a reflection of his ability to manage relationships and social interaction. Neeleman admits he has an attention deficit disorder, and uses this knowledge to his advantage. This self-awareness and ability to manage his weaknesses has been an important factor in Neeleman’s continued success. Neeleman’s leadership style closest resembles the team management style described by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton (Kreitner,

2005). This emphasis on people is apparent in the daily interactions he has with the employees of JetBlue.

Neeleman says, "I want them to know that I value what they do" (Salter, 2004, p. 3). This balance of high concern for both profitability and the people within the organization has created an atmosphere of respect and trust (Kreitner, 2005). James McGregor Burns says that a transformational leader is a "master of change" (Kreitner, 2005). This description certainly might be applied to David Neeleman. Neeleman, who has successfully started three airlines, sees opportunity that others miss. Another characteristic of a transformational leader seen in Neeleman is charisma.

Neal Moszkowski, board member of JetBlue, says, "His presence, coupled with the strength of his team, was staggering" (as cited by Kreitner, 2005, p. 380). Neeleman also has characteristics of a servant leader, as seen in his ability to communicate his vision, encourage trust, and his faith in his own insight and inspiration (Kreitner, 2005). He believes that the "best bosses practice servant leadership; helping others do their jobs better" (Salter, 2004, p. 2). Neeleman has been successful in turning his ideas into a profitable airline.

Although he is no longer with JetBlue, I believe Neeleman's leadership ability and innovative thinking will give him opportunity for success in anything he decides to do. Neeleman has strength of character that is evident in the way he conducts himself. His focus on customer service and his relationship with his employees demonstrate his social and professional abilities. While at JetBlue, Neeleman would pitch in with the flight crew, "working alongside

them, creating the JetBlue experience: great service that fosters loyal customers” (Salter, 2004). His idea of loyal customers has helped the airline find success where others have failed. JetBlue's customers can be fanatical in their devotion to the airline” (Brer, 2010), and this devotion has kept JetBlue flying high. References Brer, J. (2010, March 12). Airline Stocks Cruising Upward After Two Turbulent Years. Retrieved March 13, 2010, from <http://www.dailyfinance.com/story/investing/airline-stocks-cruising-upward-after-two-turbulent-years/19394820/> Kreitner, R. (2005). Foundations of management. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. Salter, C. (2004, May 1). And now the hard part. Retrieved March 13, 2010, from <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/82/jetblue.html?page=0,5>