

FORBES > LEADERSHIP

Is Elon Musk The Greatest Leader On Earth?

Sally Percy Contributor ⓘ*Leadership and management journalist*[Follow](#)

Sep 26, 2023, 04:57am EDT



Elon Musk is a visionary with a thirst for knowledge (Photo by Chesnot/Getty Images) GETTY IMAGES

Love him or hate him, it's hard to overstate the huge cultural significance of Elon Musk. The South-African born serial entrepreneur is the world's most talked-about business leader. There are several reasons for the widespread interest in Musk, including his outstanding professional achievements, his frequently outspoken views and his colorful personal life. Oh, and he also happens to be the richest person [on the planet](#).

While it's impossible to deny Musk's phenomenal success, the jury is out on the quality of his leadership style. Since he bought X (formerly known as Twitter) last October, his fast-paced transformation of the struggling social media giant has often appeared brutally unforgiving to the outside world.

After making sweeping staff cuts, he famously told his remaining staff that they needed to commit to "extremely hardcore" working, which included "[long hours at high intensity](#)". Musk's confrontational, sometimes erratic, behavior has even resulted in his management style being described as "[management by chaos](#)".

Elon Musk's leadership qualities

While Musk's actions and words may not always be textbook leadership good practice, he nevertheless demonstrates some remarkable qualities as a leader. These were qualities that I discovered during the course of researching my latest book, *[21st Century Business Icons: The Leaders Who Are Changing our World](#)*.

So, what are these qualities? Here are four that are key:

1. **Vision.** Musk is undoubtedly a great visionary – this is a man who wants to put people on Mars, after all. He is able paint a very vivid, inspiring picture of the future as he believes it can be – and this is what draws talented people to work for him and commit to the punishing hours that he demands of them.

MORE FROM [FORBES ADVISOR](#)

Best High-Yield Savings Accounts Of September 2023

By **Kevin Payne** Contributor

Best 5% Interest Savings Accounts of September 2023

By **Cassidy Horton** Contributor

2. Thirst for knowledge. Musk is [effectively a self-taught rocket scientist](#) who devours information. As a child, he ploughed his way through two sets of encyclopedias. Musk's determination to learn, and absorb new areas of knowledge, explains why he is such an original thinker and revolutionary innovator who continually questions the status quo.

CEO: C-suite news, analysis, and advice for top decision makers right to your inbox.

Email address

Sign Up

By signing up, you accept and agree to our [Terms of Service](#) (including the class action waiver and arbitration provisions), and you acknowledge our [Privacy Statement](#).

3. Willingness to seek feedback. Musk is a strong advocate of constructive criticism, describing a well-thought-out critique from others as [“valuable as gold”](#). This is because criticism can offer valuable insights into what is going well with a project and, even more importantly, what is going badly, so that adjustments and improvements can be made. An example of just how far Musk will go to seek feedback is when he posted a poll on X, asking whether he should step down as CEO of the platform. Over [17.5 million votes were cast](#), with the majority voting for him to go. He later appointed US media executive Linda Yaccarino to replace him as X's CEO.

4. Immense work ethic. One thing that is rarely highlighted in any of the media commentary about Musk is that being the driving force behind not one, but three hugely influential businesses, plus a

few smaller ones besides, is virtually a superhuman endeavor. Musk is CEO of rocket and satellite company SpaceX and electric car maker Tesla, as well as being executive chair and chief technology officer of X. For most leaders, holding any of those roles would be a major load on its own. The fact he combines all three is testament to his immense work ethic and his extreme resilience in the face of huge amounts of pressure.

A frequent criticism made of Musk, as a leader, is that he lacks empathy. Musk [himself has revealed](#), however, that he has Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum condition (ASC), that results in people having difficulty relating to others. Yet the fact he has an ASC also helps to explain some of Musk's notable strengths, including his remarkable focus and persistence and his strong attention to detail.

Elon Musk: an extraordinary leader

All the leaders that I researched for my book are extraordinary businesspeople. But even among the elite group of people that I profiled, Musk stands out for his impact on both business and the broader world.

In a BBC documentary last year, Dolly Singh, formerly head of talent at SpaceX, described Musk as “[arguably the best leader on the face of the planet](#)”. Whether or not that is true is a matter of personal opinion and depends on your view of what a great leader looks like. But the conclusion that I came to – following my own research – is that, whether you like the sound of him or not, Musk is probably the most extraordinary person alive on the planet today. *Follow me on [Twitter](#).*



Sally Percy

Follow

I am an experienced business journalist and editor who specializes in writing about leadership and management. I have edited several business magazines and am currently... **Read More**

[Editorial Standards](#)[Reprints & Permissions](#)ADVERTISEMENT

Join Our Conversation 1 Comment

Commenting on this article has ended

[Log in](#)

Sort by **Best** ▾

G

Guest

26 September, 2023

Wow, a well thought out and objective article, a rarity for Musk these days. Thanks

1 ▪ [Share](#)

Powered by  OpenWeb

[Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Feedback](#)