

Case Analysis: Jack Ma - The Leading Force Behind Alibaba

INTRODUCTION: Leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” It is a multi-faceted process and can be viewed through a variety of lenses. This exercise will challenge your knowledge of leadership and have you apply some of the basics to the case of Jack Ma – the leading force behind the Asian retail giant, Alibaba.

MINI-CASE: Jack Ma - The Leading Force Behind Alibaba

“The finance industry needs a disrupter, it needs an outsider to come in and carry out a transformation,” Jack Ma, Founder and Executive Chairman of the Alibaba Group, wrote in an opinion article for the official newspaper of the Communist Party. This idea of disruption and transformation has influenced Ma throughout his time as a leader for the Alibaba Group. Today, Ma continues to act as the company’s main strategist.

Ma grew the small company he began in his apartment in 1999 into China’s largest retailer by 2014. Ma is well-known for not following a traditional path to success. Unlike many other dot-com billionaires, Ma began his career as an English teacher with no background in technology. His success rests in an aptitude for creating new markets from existing industries. Ma has begun ventures and innovation in various industries such as banking and finance, mobile phone communications, department store business, and film production.

Ma’s innovation and creativity translate from his external business transactions to the way he interacts with his employees. For example, in 2009, not only did Jack Ma sing a rendition of “Can You Feel the Love Tonight?” in front of 16,000 employees, but he also walked onto the stage dressed in a long white wig, a studded leather jacket, sunglasses, and lipstick. Ma is a leader that will do anything to inspire and motivate his people to accomplish a common goal. He stated, “I had always wished that I was born in a period of war. I could have been a general. I thought about what I could have achieved in war.” This passion and perseverance to achieve his and his company’s goals has made Ma an extremely successful leader of the time.

Jack Ma’s interest in Alibaba’s success has been motivated by an interest in the well-being of other people, rather than just his own personal gains. For example, while Alibaba.com was first forming, Ma gave equity to all of the high school students working for him. In addition, Ma, along with a co-founder, has donated up to 2 percent of Alibaba’s stock (worth several billion dollars) to charitable trusts financing environmental, educational, and medical programs. Ma’s dedication to the people that make up his company and the causes he believes in are a large factor in his success as a leader of such a large and flourishing company.

Sources:

Gough, Neil and Stevenson, Alexandra. “The Unlikely Ascent of Jack Ma, Alibaba’s Founder.” The New York Times. May 7, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/technology/the-unlikely-ascent-of-jack-ma-alibabas-founder.html?_r=0

