

George Ilian



—
VISIONARIES
WHO CHANGED
THE WORLD
SERIES

JACK MA

— Success Secrets —



Visionary Leaders

JACK MA

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Success Secrets

—
VISIONARIES WHO CHANGED THE WORLD SERIES

George Ilian



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Introduction

Jack Ma can be called the instigator of China's rise to the first position in the market of internet and mobile phone users. He started the most successful e-commerce firm in the world, the Alibaba Group, which set the record for the largest public stock offering in 2014. It has broadened its influence by investing in movies, creating a sports division, and even forming an online portal with US-based Macy's.

Ma went through some issues in 2015, when his company was accused of selling counterfeit goods. Consequently, Alibaba Group's stock price fell by 50%. However, he kept calm and stuck by his company.

The sale of knock-off goods by third-party merchants is a risk that all operators of third party transaction platforms globally face, including eBay and Amazon.

True, short, and to-the-point.

Jack Ma is fresh off the biggest IPO in history and has earned enough to make him the richest person in China. His net worth is estimated at around \$25 billion!

The reason that Jack Ma can teach us so much is because his is truly a rags-to-riches story. He grew up in poverty living in communist China, failed to pass his college entrance exam twice, and was rejected from a lot of different jobs – including KFC! It took all of that before he found success by creating his own company—Alibaba.

This is a journey through the life of Jack Ma, looking at 50 important life and business lessons that can be learned from his incredible story. It does not matter where you come from – success is about defining where you're going.

“Remember that your past success may lead to your future failure. However, if you learn a lesson from every failure, then you may ultimately succeed.”

—Jack Ma

One

A Future Leader is Born

Jack Ma is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world. He defines what it means to be a talented and exceptional leader.

On 15 October 1964 in Hangzhou, Jack Ma was born. He grew up with his siblings at a time when China was isolated from the Western world. His family was poor so his journey began with a lot of obstacles. He went on to defy the odds and create the successful company known as Alibaba.

Seek opportunity.

Jack Ma understood from a young age that he would have to seek opportunities and they would not be handed to him on a silver platter. It is easy to see that when he speaks because he places those who fail into a very specific category—being intolerant to opportunity. For instance, you can look at the corporate sector where people are content with their 9 to 5 jobs. Yet, they complain about never having the opportunity to do more.

Start looking across the landscape with a broader lens. Consider all possibilities. You must get out there and seek opportunity. It won't just come to you. Leave no stone unturned, search in every nook. When opportunity presents itself, you have to be open to it.

See past your circumstances.

Born into poverty, Jack Ma made plans instead of making excuses. Your current status does not matter when it comes to success. How

rich you are at the moment, where you were born or how you grew up, the level of education you have received does not matter. Success is governed by your spirit, fortitude, and hardiness. What matters is what you do from this point on. If you feel that you lack the education to achieve your goals, then read some books or go back to school to learn the skills that you lack. If you are poor, then become prudent with your money. What you do now matters more than where you started. If success depended on where you start, then rags-to-riches stories like Jack Ma wouldn't exist.

“The opportunities that everyone cannot see are the real opportunities.”

—Jack Ma

Focus on your ambition.

Jack Ma is definitely a visionary. The key to becoming a great visionary is to hone your vision and then focus completely on it. People try to actualise several visions at once, never really focusing on a single one. This is a huge mistake because it spreads your resources thin, rather than consolidating them towards a single vision.

We all have a vision; it's only a matter of finding it. It's your job to become a visionary by concentrating on your ambition. Focus on your goal, work smart to achieve it and never let it go!

Be courageous.

When Jack Ma started the Alibaba Group, he received a lot of negative feedback from friends, family, and others who would be expected to be supportive. We know that his company grew into a highly successful group of internet businesses, but what if he had let fear control him? What if Jack Ma had let those negative, limiting beliefs from friends and family persuade him to never launch the company? The world would have never known the Alibaba Group. You need to be courageous in pursuit of your vision because there are always going to be people who are going to tell you that it is impossible. Dare to be bold. Pursue your chosen ambition now!

Understand the value of attitude.

When Jack Ma talks about mistakes that he made in the past, he always falls on the one that he considers his biggest mistake. When he founded Alibaba, he recalls telling his entire team that the most

they would ever be were managers. He firmly believed that executives should be hired from outside of the company.

Ultimately, he learned his lesson on that one. Today, he emphasizes just how important it is to have the right attitude over theoretical skills.

The human mind is the most sophisticated machine on the planet. You choose what is installed on it, so ensure that you install productive software as opposed to unproductive garbage. This software is what programs your attitude. You need to have complete control over your attitude. The problem is that we were all programmed with a limiting attitude at a very young age. That information could have been inaccurate. Our inner voice is overpowering so if it is negative, it is working against you. Since you are in control, make sure that you are optimistic. When talking about attitude, Jack Ma emphasizes that a bad attitude is the product of past experiences in our lives. It takes a lot of work to find the roots of a harmful attitude and remove that baggage. Once you do, the rewards that follow will remain with you for the rest of your life.

“When people think too highly of you, you have the responsibility to calm down and be yourself.”

—Jack Ma

You must have foresight.

Great leaders have foresight. Jack Ma believes that great leaders have to stay ahead of the competition by anticipating how everything will play out. Foresight is much more than coming up with a long-term strategy or a mere prediction. It involves analytical and imaginative thinking that goes above and beyond the normal approaches that corporations use for strategic planning. Further, you have to consider multiple scenarios looking at long-term trends while including individual and expert stimulus in order to shift your future expectations.

In simple terms, foresight is about spotting future trends, basing multiple scenarios on them and then coming up with a way to add value to your business. Look at how Apple always seems to stay ahead of new trends. When you have the foresight to spot these trends before they happen, you can shift your products and services so they are ready to add value based on that trend. Foresight isn't always logical – it often explores contradictions to market data to build possible scenarios. Sometimes it does rely on intuition but mostly a market analysis is the best approach. Take the time to develop these creative thinking skills in order to grow into a great business leader.

You don't need prior connections to succeed.

Yes, you will need to build a network but that's not what I'm talking about. Ma teaches us is that you don't need a rich father or a powerful uncle to be successful. The best success stories come from those who had no connections, and worked their way to the top – just like Jack Ma did. He started Alibaba from his apartment in Hangzhou, China. If you create a product or service that helps fulfil a need, then your customers are going to be the only connections you

need in the beginning. Eventually you will need to build a professional network but it's not a prerequisite for achieving success. The most valuable connections are established as a by-product on your way to being successful. They are not required to start your journey.

Smart men use their brain.

One of the lessons that Jack Ma teaches us is that smart men use their brain. Anything that comes from another person is not meaningful if it does not challenge you to engage your own beliefs. What you choose to feed into your mind works the same way as food. Allowing people to feed you their limiting beliefs is the equivalent of eating junk food. It is not good for you. Instead of letting others feed you limiting beliefs, start engaging your own mind. Utilize your intellect to make informed decisions. If you find it difficult to silence the negative opinions of people around you, then it might be time to find new individuals to surround yourself with. Of course, if you use your brain more, then you need to make sure that it's as powerful as it can be. There are a lot of things that you can do to promote better brain function. For example, take up new activities to acquire new skills. Curiosity is quite empowering to the mind. Staying positive is another way to keep your brain working at peak efficiency.

Wise men use their heart.

Jack Ma understands that it's important that leaders are able to trust their intuition when necessary. Decisions from the heart stem from confidence and passion. There are times in business when you should make decisions based on faith rather than logic. They are rare, but important decisions. Normally, decisions that are based on faith usually help in identifying strategic objectives.

All leaders have two sides to their psyche – an analytical side and an intuitive side. Contrary to what some might believe, they are both equally important. Only individuals who are smart and wise will achieve the highest level of success. For example, let's say that you're looking to outsource an important task to another business. You have two candidates and one seems better on paper, but you love the other company. This is where following your heart might get you into trouble so you need to use some logic. Naturally, you would never choose to work with a company that you don't feel comfortable with, but you would not want to work with a company that's not qualified either. Wisdom is not about always following your heart. It's about learning how to differentiate between your intuition and emotional attachment. Emotional attachment leads to decreased objectivity while intuition leads to better decisions.

Short-term passion is worthless.

Jack Ma says that short-term passion is worthless. You have to be in business for the long-term if you want to reap the fruits of success. The reason is setbacks are such a common occurrence that you must have a long-term vision to help you make it through those difficult times. Success is all about handling setbacks. Short-term passion causes you to start second-guessing your routine. Maintaining a positive outlook and planning accordingly are both paramount to running a successful business.

Write down your long-term vision and post it where you can see it every day. Then start envisioning the end result. When Jack Ma was faced with his many setbacks (and there were a lot of them), he fell back on his long-term passion. When you find yourself worrying due to a setback, having your vision posted will help counter that worry. List all of your successes, no matter how small they are. Post those along with your vision.

“We’re never in lack of money. We lack people with dreams, (people) who can die for those dreams.”

—Jack Ma

Two

Growing Up is a Journey

Growing up, Ma ended up in a lot of fights with classmates because of his aggressive nature. Aggression is not necessarily bad when it is used in a constructive way, but fighting was probably the result of adolescence mixed with an aggressive attitude. Ma has been quoted as saying,

“I was never afraid of opponents who were bigger than me.”

He also had a few other hobbies that might seem a bit strange, like collecting crickets and making them fight each other. One thing that is notable about that time is that Ma says he was able to distinguish the size and type of cricket by listening to the sound it made. Adolescence is the stage in life when seeds of change are sown.

Be tenacious.

Foresight is only one element to being a great leader. Jack Ma says that tenacity is another key component in leadership. However, tenacity alone is not enough. You must have a vision to go along with it so that you know exactly what you are trying to achieve. The combination of having a unified vision and the tenacity to chase it down is powerful. It puts you on the direct path to success. Further, it will inspire those around you to work harder to achieve that vision. Two of the essential keys to Jack Ma's business philosophy are to never take “no” for an answer and to always take pride in your work.

You only fail if you give up.

Jack Ma's philosophy is,

Giving up is the greatest failure.

As long as you get out there and try your best, even if you fail to achieve a goal then make sure that you see it through until the end. If you do, then it's not truly a failure. All great leaders fail at various points in their life. We learn more from failure than we do from anything else in life. What defines a great leader is being able to learn from their failures and keep moving forward. That's the true secret to success – the ability to persevere and learn from mistakes. Do not give up!

Vision, tenacity, and grit are essential.

There are three skills that are absolutely vital for successful leaders. They are vision, tenacity, and grit. First, a leader has to have visionary skills in order to see new opportunities when they arise. In addition, that vision must also acknowledge challenges before they come into play. However, having a vision is not enough. Great leaders are those who have the tenacity to hang in there through difficult times. Most people give up, but great leaders push onward. Finally, grit is the ability to do whatever is needed in order to get the job done. Jack Ma possesses all three of these important skills, as do all great leaders. The good news is that these skills can all be learned and developed. People are not born with them; they learn these skills from coaches, mentors, or books.

Love life.

“I always tell myself that we are born here not to work, but to enjoy life. We are here to make things better for one another, and not to work. If you are spending your whole life working, you will certainly regret it.”

– Jack Ma

This quote says it all. It doesn't just lie in the heart of Jack Ma, but every highly successful entrepreneur has the same outlook on life. Whatever you choose to do should always be designed to help improve humanity and be something that you are passionate about. Your goal cannot be about money. If that's your goal, then you need to do some soul searching. Change your mindset or else you will not be successful. Money is a side effect of offering something valuable to the world. It should never be the overall objective.

Be more ambitious than anyone else.

Jack Ma's job was to be more diligent, hardworking, and ambitious than anyone else in his field. I think he achieved that. One of Ma's simplified formulas for success is to be diligent, work hard, and don't lose sight of ambition. Let's look at what makes ambition so powerful.

First, ambition makes you more open to taking risks. It makes you willing to step out of your comfort zone and face your fears. This is an important aspect to success that I cannot emphasize enough. You cannot be successful while remaining in your comfort zone. By leaving your comfort zone, you force yourself into a new way of thinking. You can't solve a problem with the same mindset that was used to create it. Thinking differently allows us to grow beyond what we are. It often leads us to unexpected results.

Another powerful benefit of ambition is that it makes you focus on execution. Often, people spend too much time working on building

their skill set or researching. However, they don't spend enough time on execution. There comes a point when you have to pull the trigger. Ma says,

"If your execution is poor, nothing matters."

You have to get stuff done or else you are wasting the opportunity. Finally, that brings us to another important lesson. Ambitious people tend to surround themselves with other ambitious people. You are the sum of the five people closest to you, so make sure those people share your vision.

Every opportunity is an open door.

Jack Ma understands that no opportunity is beneath anyone. When opportunity is in front of you, seize it! Those who look at an opportunity and say, "I'll never do that because it's beneath me," are the same people who are never successful. Grab the opportunity and then work on it with all of your passion. Do you think Jack Ma saw an opportunity and let limiting beliefs drive his decisions? Of course not! Growing up in poverty meant that every opportunity was golden. He knew that and made the most of them all. Follow his example. Bring everything you have to the table and always treat opportunities like gold, because they are limited.

Seek understanding.

Seeking opportunity is only the first step. Next comes the daunting task of understanding that opportunity. It all starts with understanding your current position and the one you aspire to be in. Jack Ma's position was that he was from a poor family, living in a world that had limited opportunities. His vision was to move above that position into one of success. He knew exactly what he was working for. It's

important that you follow the same lead. You have to know exactly what you're working towards. You also have to understand why you want it so badly. Finally, you have to lay out a plan for exactly how you are going to get to where you want to be. Trying to understand always comes before success.

The world is your oyster.

It's essential that you understand exactly what it is that you're planning for yourself and everyone on your team. Even though you should be spreading out the workload as much as possible, be sure to actively participate whenever you can. Sometimes you simply don't have the people to grow, so a lot of people wait for the next batch of skilled individuals to graduate. Waiting is always a mistake. It's your world so get out there and act! Empower yourself by taking action. No one knows your business like you do. So use that first-hand knowledge to develop strategies for both yourself and your business. I would say that major changes are usually what cause people to play the waiting game. Those who actually get out there and take action right after major change are the ones who reap the greatest benefits. It's your world so start living your dream instead of waiting!

“When the team’s all a bunch of scientists, it is best to have a peasant lead the way. His way of thinking is different. It’s easier to win if you have people seeing things from different perspectives.”

—Jack Ma

Cast aside your pride.

You can only improve as an entrepreneur when you cast aside your pride and become willing to learn from those who are competing against you. Any business can benefit from studying and learning from their competition. Even large corporations look at smaller business models to learn new strategies. Why would these large companies do this? Because it works! But, you have to know what to learn from your competition. Further, never copy them. Your job is to learn and restructure your business idea in a way that reflects the knowledge gained. Using chess as an example, if black were to simply copy every move made by white, then white would always stay a move ahead. The same is true of business.

The first step is to understand exactly what your competitor's vision is and why it works. By analyzing each move that's made by a competitor, it will help you see what works and what doesn't. Make a list of both the positives and negatives. The secret to being successful is not a difficult concept – it's the execution that separates success from failure. Make sure that you discover what works for competitors. More importantly, see what doesn't work so you can avoid it.

You must have the correct mindset.

Success should be about fighting for a sense of achievement in watching your business grow rather than chasing fancy designations like CEO. Your business should be fulfilling in a way that transcends fancy titles. Make sure that you are in business for the right reasons. Do you truly enjoy helping your customers? Do you believe in your products/services? Do you get annoyed if someone says you are “working” as opposed to “running a business?” If so, then you

probably have the wrong mindset. Titles should not matter to you, only what you are doing to improve the world should matter.

Three

Never Give Up

Back in 1972, President Nixon visited Jack Ma's hometown of Hangzhou. That led to a change in his hometown. It quickly became a tourist town where people from everywhere would visit. Ma was only a teenager at the time but it changed him. He started waking up earlier in the mornings so that he could visit the city's main hotel in an attempt to offer tours of the city in exchange for English lessons. That's where he received the nickname "Jack."

Even though he had no connections, he got ahead of the game through education. However, his next setback came when he failed his university entrance exam not once, but twice. Setbacks are simply obstacles that need to be overcome and Ma did just that by passing on his third attempt at the entrance exam. In 1988, he achieved his goal and graduated.

Winners don't complain.

Jack Ma understands that occasionally, things will go wrong and those bad moments often cause poor spirits. However, people who complain all the time are paving their own road to failure. Everything is much more difficult for those who complain all the time. They don't deal well with challenges because they tend to blame others for their own failures. They have trouble fighting through hardship because they make excuses. The truth is that how you deal with hardship and challenges indicates just how successful you're going to be. If you complain, then you will not be able to win. Here are a few tips to keep you from falling into this bad habit.

Don't focus on the problem without looking for solutions. When you are facing a difficult situation, the most difficult and worthwhile

action is to find a workable solution. Complaining does absolutely no good.

Another solution that a lot of large companies have found is that there is a connection between the morale of employees and the size of their office. Believe it or not, studies have shown that smaller offices give employees a higher morale. My point here is that the best leaders show a vested interest in their team. Instead of complaining when something goes wrong, they confer with these trusted individuals to help solve the problem. Remember that the higher the morale of your team, the more effective they will be. Again, making the office smaller is an easy way to boost morale.

Finally, the best approach to avoid complaining is to become a myth buster. Myths will drag you down a destructive path. Research is where you spend the most time running a business. As long as you understand your vision and show patience, you will find that complaining is unnecessary.

Never give up.

You never know what you can accomplish until you try it. You never know whether a new business idea will work until you have followed through with it until the end. You simply cannot succeed without failing at some point. Show me a successful entrepreneur and I will show you an individual who has failed at some point in their life. When an idea fails, change the strategies, plan, or use a different approach. Don't give up! The moment you give up is the moment when you truly fail to accomplish a goal.

Persevere.

Jack Ma faced a lot of difficult challenges on his journey to the top. He had to show perseverance through all of those difficult times in order to fight his way up. There will be difficult times. Challenges

occur at every point in a company – even at launch. That’s why it’s so important that you have a plan laid out. That plan will provide you with a map to navigate those rough waters when you might seem lost. However, even that is not quite enough. You must have the perseverance to make it through those difficult times.

Jack Ma learnt early in his business that if he didn’t give up, then he still had a chance to succeed. Alibaba had a lot of setbacks but he remained focused on his vision. When a business is small, it’s important that you remain focused on that vision because if you lose it (even for a moment) then you are headed down a path of failure.

Jack Ma now refers to Alibaba as “1001 mistakes” because he made so many mistakes while running it.

You can only understand resilience after hardship.

There are some lessons in life that you cannot learn until you have experienced them. Resilience is one of them. Having a theoretical understanding of being resilient means nothing, nor does the capacity to be resilient. Only by experiencing hardship can you truly understand resilience. Let me explain this in more detail since it’s a very important concept to learn.

“You’ve to make consumers smart. An e-commerce portal doesn’t sell a product at cheaper rates, instead an offline shop sells it at a costlier prices.”

—Jack Ma

“No matter how tough the chase is, you should always have the dream you saw on the first day. It’ll keep you motivated and rescue you from any weak thoughts.”

—Jack Ma

According to physics, resilience is elasticity but when it comes to its application to business, we tend to see it as an ability to recover or bounce back from hardship. By this philosophy, the belief is that resilient people are the same before and after adversity tests them. This is a limiting belief that holds people back. If we believe that resilience is simply “bouncing back,” then we miss so much of the lesson that we should learn from these hardships. The truth is that we can’t bounce back. We have yet to discover the ability to go back in time and become the same person we used to be. Think about it: A soldier who ships to war is gone forever, replaced by a new individual. What has been done cannot be undone. It might sound harsh, but it’s the truth. Resilience is not the ability to bounce back from hardship – it’s the ability to fight through it, learn from it and come out of it a better person. My advice to you is when you’re dealing with hardship, grit your teeth, learn from the experience and then move on.

Always expect the unexpected.

Jack Ma loves to pull quotes from one of his favorite films, *Forest Gump* “Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get.” The point is that you really don’t ever know when adversity is going to strike, so you have to be prepared for it. There are so many things that are completely out of your control. With that said, you can control a few things as long as you prepare for it. Let’s look at a couple of examples:

Imagine that you’re running a company and you come to work one morning and find a resignation letter from your top salesman. He’s leaving your company to join a competitor. When something takes you by surprise, it’s extremely difficult to handle it gracefully. You should have a plan in place for any possible adversity. Expect that it’s going to happen at one point. What can you do to prevent it from happening? Taking the salesman example, if you are worried that might happen then you can improve your relationship with that

salesman in order to prevent him from leaving in the future. Perhaps you could structure your system in such a way that it does not depend on just one person.

Adversity is difficult to foresee, but you need to consider all possibilities and the course of action to be taken in all situations. This will make it easier to overcome problems.

Having a different mindset provides a different outcome.

You can find several instances of Jack Ma making this statement. When you make different choices than your peers, then you are going to create a different life than them. This is important because it teaches us to never copy someone else. Business jealousy is an issue that many entrepreneurs face. As a result, they start trying to copy their competitors. Never, ever try to copy your peers because you don't know what their life is like behind the scenes. Create your own legacy. Dare to be different. By having a different mindset, you are creating a life that you want rather than chasing after something that is not yours. Just follow the basic business model and you will be okay. Create your vision, set goals and achieve them.

Act quickly.

The race is usually won by the one who is quickest to act. That doesn't imply that you blindly rush into things. It just means that you get the ball rolling as quickly as possible. The most important time to act quickly is when you are bouncing back from a failure. It's not about being quick all the time. When an opportunity presents itself, then you need to respond quickly. A lot of opportunities present themselves right after failure. Throughout his life, Jack Ma has always had an uncanny ability to act quickly. Sure, he failed sometimes but that didn't stop him from continuing on his path to

realizing his goals. That's another reason why it's so important to understand exactly what your goals are. You act faster when you know your next step.

Change the world by investing in youth.

According to Jack Ma, one of the secrets to life is helping those who truly want to be successful achieve their goals. Helping young people become successful creates a better future for everyone as they establish themselves and can deliver huge results. The youth are the secret to creating a better world. Jack Ma says,

“Young people will have the seeds you bury in their minds and when they grow up they will change the world.”

– Jack Ma

Truer words have never been spoken. Given the chance, help in spreading your knowledge to others – especially young people. If you become successful enough, consider funding scholarship programs or even volunteer for mentorships. If you dig deep into many of the most successful companies in the world, you will find that they have a lot of programs targeted at helping youths. There are so many distractions and limiting beliefs that are being fed to individuals growing up, that they need all of the support they can get.

Honesty is proven.

As an entrepreneur and aspiring leader, you should strive to prove that your business is honest. It can't be sold like a commodity. Honesty is earned through every transaction, by paying close attention to detail. Jack Ma preaches honesty quite diligently but he

also backs it up with his company. That said, honesty is a long-term, sustainable business model.

Why would an entrepreneur lie? There are two reasons why businesses might lie: either out of fear or out of greed. Businesses that lie based on greed are not going to be in business for long. Those are the ones you see being slapped with class-action lawsuits. If you want to be successful, you need to follow Jack Ma's advice on this one and always be honest. The most profitable business models are ones that promote honesty. Honesty is in the smallest details: It starts with the stories you tell. Only share true stories about your business. Never fabricate stories for the sake of credibility, because you can lose it all by lying. Honesty with transactions involves ensuring that all terms are listed up-front. If your vision is to provide services designed to help customers solve a problem, then being honest is extremely easy. The dishonest usually just chase profits.

Take calculated risks while you are young.

Ma says that if you are not rich by the time you're 35, then it's your own fault because you have wasted all the opportunities of youth. If you have not taken a risk by the time you're 35 then that's why you haven't been successful. Wealth is not the product that drives ambition; it is a side effect of making that ambition a success. Capitalize on your youth and make every opportunity count. Give in completely to your ambition and the pursuit of it. You cannot get anywhere in life without taking risks. Even keeping a secure 9 to 5 job is a risk in itself – you are risking growing old with regret. Why not take a risk for something great?

Four

Alibaba is Born

After graduating from university, Jack Ma would go on to apply to a lot of different jobs. He was continuously rejected – he even got rejected from KFC! Finally, he was hired as an English teacher. He says that he loved that job but only made the equivalent of \$12 per month. During his first trip to the United States, Ma was spellbound with his first experience with the internet. He had recently started a translation business and made the trip in an effort to help a Chinese firm recover a payment from someone. When searching the internet for “beer,” Ma’s vision was born. He noticed that no results showed up from China. That was when he decided to set up his internet company.

Jack Ma’s first two attempts at starting his business failed. It took him four years before he sorted out his vision. He gathered 17 of his friends and talked them into investing in Alibaba. What’s important for you to understand is that in order to convince those friends to invest money, Ma had to show them a vision that was so powerful that they would be willing to invest their hard-earned money.

Ma got the ball rolling on Alibaba and it eventually gained traction, attracting people from all over the world. It’s said that Ma came up with the name Alibaba when he was sitting in a coffee shop in San Francisco. In ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves’, a password is used to unlock a room that is loaded with unspeakable riches. In a way, Ma saw his company as a way to unlock the potential for businesses to connect across the world.

 **Unify your team to a common cause.**

I'm sure that you understand the power of teamwork. However, Jack Ma knew that you can never be successful in getting every member of a team behind you. Roughly 30% of people will disagree with you. That means that the goal should be to get the team behind a mission, rather than an individual leader. That's how you unite them in the most productive way. You might not always get them to agree with you personally, but you can get them to agree on a unified vision. Building a team is the most important aspect to being successful. You cannot do it on your own.

Make yourself replaceable.

Many people believe that successful entrepreneurs are irreplaceable but the opposite is actually true. The most successful entrepreneurs make sure that they are replaceable. Let me explain. One of the main goals to achieving a mission is to reduce the dependency on any one person. That includes the founder and bosses. Build the idea in a way that allows you to teach it to others. That way, you are able to walk away from the business if you need to. Entrepreneurs who become chained to their business never have time to be happy, so they aren't achieving the highest level of success. They become their own bottleneck. By making yourself replaceable, you are able to ensure that your vision will continue even if you're not present.

Hire people with superior skills.

Jack Ma has been quoted many times as saying that,

“Your employee should have superior technical skills than you. If he doesn't, it means you have hired the wrong person.”

That's what he believes separates a good leader from a great leader. An employee's skills are very important so hire people who

can carry out the vision that you have for your business. What happens with many people is that they hire people who possess fewer skills than they have out of ignorance or a sense of pride. However, you have to hire people who are as skilled (preferably more skilled) than you are. It's the only way that you can build a great company.

Decision-making is the most important skill.

Yes, having the ability to make the best decisions is more important than any other skill in business. Jack Ma is one of the greatest decision-makers on the planet. You can look at a lot of successful leaders to see just how important a skill this is. Not all leaders have the highest IQ, nor are they the most qualified person to lead their business on paper. What makes them such great leaders is their ability to make savvy decisions. These leaders are smart enough to surround themselves with experts and always use them for input, but when it comes to making an important decision they are second to none. At the end of the day, decisions are what drive a business forward. It's not how qualified a leader is, but their ability to make tough decisions that ultimately leads them on a path to success.

Customers are always first.

Leaders understand that they only have a limited amount of time and energy to commit to their business. That means that we have to set priorities. Jack Ma believes that your customers should always come first, followed by employees. After those two have been taken care of, investors are then given attention. There are a lot of businesses that do not follow this order. They spend all of their time and energy catering to their shareholders. This is not a sustainable business model. If you want to be successful, then you have to have a business plan in writing, which puts your customers first. When you

find investors, make sure they are given a written copy of the plan that shows them exactly what they can expect. In reality, most businesses have a plan for their customers, employees, and investors. This shows each party exactly what they can expect out of the relationship with your business.

Forget about money.

You cannot launch a business for the sole purpose of making money. In fact, money is simply the fuel that drives your vision. Your vision is something that will benefit humanity in some way or another. It should be designed to help a group of people solve a problem. Jack Ma didn't start the Alibaba Group with the sole purpose of getting rich. The amount of money you earn is directly proportional to the contribution you make on the world. Create a genuinely helpful product or service and the money will come naturally, as long as you work hard to achieve your vision.

Finding the right people is of paramount importance.

Finding the right people does not always mean that they are the most skilled or have acquired the highest education. Just because a person might seem more skilled on paper doesn't mean that they are going to fit well into your vision. Skills like ambition, trustworthiness, and attitude are what you need to look for. An individual must still be qualified to do the job, but your system should be simple enough that it doesn't take masterful skills to do the job in the first place. When you are creating a team, you want it to be full of people who are highly motivated and have a positive attitude. Actual skillset comes second to those factors. Jack Ma always talks about finding people who can grow and evolve with his company. That's because those are the best ones. You can help an individual develop skills, but you can't develop their attitude.

Free is usually expensive.

This lesson is actually a two-way street. There are two types of free in business: things that you get for free and things you give away for free. Remember that nothing is truly ever free though. For example, if you give away a free product like an eBook, you usually ask an individual to subscribe to an email list. So you might be giving something away but you are getting something valuable in return. My point is that I want you to remember that whenever you get a “free” product from another company then you need to give them something in return as well.

Sometimes that might be an email address. However, sometimes you actually give them things that are more valuable than the money you are saving. A good example of that is free web hosting. You save around \$10 per month by using free web hosting but they spam your site with their ads, so they are essentially pulling customers away from you. Let me ask you, is that service really worth saving \$10 per month?

Jack Ma says that when you give away products for “free,” then you are essentially giving away profits. However, the same can be said of using free products. Always think carefully before you use anything labelled as “free.”

Starting a business is scary.

Jack Ma never says that starting a business is an easy task. If you have ever heard him speak, you will hear him use words like ‘difficult’ and ‘scary’ a lot. Starting a business is probably the scariest endeavor you will ever take on. You lose a stable income which is scary. However, the advantage is that your income is no longer limited. Starting your own business forces you to use your time more wisely. My point is that the rewards far outweigh the risks. The problem is that we all define rewards differently. Some people see wealth as a reward, but those people tend to sabotage themselves.

Those who seek to conquer the unknown while changing the world are the ones who are most likely to succeed.

Let's look at the reality of the birth of a new business. You give up the normal nine-to-five guarantee in exchange for much more than 40 hours of work per week. In the beginning, you will probably need to work upwards of 80 hours per week. This isn't permanent but it is necessary in the beginning. The rewards will come several years down the road. It's definitely a long-term endeavor.

Starting a business is scary, but the potential rewards are worth facing your fears. Just remember that you can't go into it blindly. You must have a long-term vision.

Be aware of your customers' needs.

Always be aware of your customers because they are going to be the life source of your business. That might sound like common sense, but a lot of entrepreneurs get so caught up in their business that they forget about their customers. By understanding your customers inside out, you are able to give them the products and services that they need. Jack Ma's vision was to provide businesses with a way to do business online. It was a customer-driven business model.

The truth is that you can't organize a quality service organization without fully understanding exactly what it is that you are delivering. That means that you have to know their pain points. Most customers will fall under one of four categories: they either need to be understood, welcomed with open arms, need to feel important, or they need to be comforted. So the first step is to identify which category they belong to.

Once you have identified your customers, then you will be in a position to develop products or services that help them solve a problem. Amazon is a great example to use here. They have a ton of systems set up so that they can identify with their customers. Their entire business model is built around those systems – from their

customer feedback system to their award-winning customer service team, they constantly address the needs of their customers. The key to creating the best products is to first understand your customers' needs.

Five

Life Transcends Business

As Alibaba continued to grow, Ma made sure that he kept a sense of fun and excitement in the workplace. For example, when the company became profitable for the first time, he gave everyone in the office a can of silly string and told them to go wild.

At the turn of the century, Ma decided to start Taobao which would become a direct competitor of eBay. During their breaks, Ma would have his team do handstands in order to keep their energy level up. That's the sort of fun workplace he tried to create.

The biggest turning point came in 2005 when Yahoo invested \$1 billion in Alibaba. They effectively purchased a 40% stake in the company. That was when Alibaba was struggling to compete with eBay. It was a win-win situation as it landed Yahoo! \$10 billion in Alibaba's IPO alone.

Jack Ma created his super successful company and then decided that it was time to step down as CEO in 2013. He did stay on as an executive chairman. His main goals had been accomplished. Ma was quoted as saying,

"Today what we got is not money. What we got is trust from the people."

Ma eventually developed an interest in protecting the environment when one of his in-laws developed an illness that was caused by pollution. He already has several noteworthy accomplishments as an environmentalist, including sitting on The Nature Conservancy Board, speaking during the Clinton Global Initiative, and funding a huge nature reserve in China.

Don't make enemies.

Friendly competition is one of Jack Ma's unique business philosophies. You don't see this in every successful business, but you do see it in successful businesses that are fun. For example, Netflix is constantly aligning with competitors in order to offer more value. I don't think anyone could look at Netflix as a cut-throat business model, because it's the opposite. Jack Ma has never viewed his competition as enemies. They are friends whom he can learn from and they challenge him in a way that forces him to always strive to be better. Competition is important because it motivates us to improve ourselves.

Money and political power must be separated.

Money and political power cannot exist together without severe ramifications. They are like a powder keg and a match. If both exist together, then there will be a horrific explosion. Jack Ma has reaffirmed this in many speeches throughout his career. If you're interested in attaining both, then you must do so separately. Never try to achieve both at the same time.

When you are running a business, you should never even think about running for a political office. The same is true for those with political power – they should never try to become rich.

Take your competition seriously.

Jack Ma believes that no competitors are giants until you make them a giant in your own mind. Always treat your competition with the same respect as you would treat your own business. More importantly, take them all seriously. Never underestimate a company. Everyone has an equal chance at success in today's world. That underdog whom you overlooked might end up being the one who

beats you! Like I said earlier, competition is an important part of business. Without it, we are content. Being content is business suicide. So always analyze, communicate and be sincere with your competition. Above all else, be ethical. Even if a competitor tries to undermine you with unethical tactics, it's best to stick to your standards.

Money is responsibility – not happiness.

When Jack Ma graduated, he earned \$20 per month teaching English in China. That was good money for the time and area. Here's how Ma words it:

“When you have one million dollars, you’re a lucky person. When you have 10 million dollars, you’ve got trouble, a lot of headaches. When you have more than one billion dollars, or a hundred million dollars, that’s a responsibility you have—it’s the trust of people on you, because people believe you can spend money better than the others.”

That pretty much says it all. The more wealth you accumulate, the more responsibilities you have. Entrepreneurs are responsible for the livelihood of more people than just themselves. Their employees count on them for jobs and their investors count on them to make good decisions.

See yourself as a giant.

Every juggernaut of a company started small. Every entrepreneur has to start somewhere. Everyone starts out with an equal chance. Jack Ma believes that every entrepreneur should see themselves as a giant when starting their business.

See yourself as an equal to your competition and act accordingly. That confidence is important to staying motivated. It helps you find the courage to take risks. I'm not telling you to get a big head and start taking dumb risks. However, you should never look at yourself as an underdog. Sure, all rags-to-riches stories are compelling because there is an underdog who rises to the top. However, they never see themselves as an underdog. In their minds, they are giants right from the beginning. They have the confidence to keep going when adversity knocks them down.

“Before you’re 30, work for a small company, learn passion, learn to dream.”

—Jack Ma

Enjoy life.

Jack Ma entreats us to enjoy life, as opposed to working all of the time. So many people spend all of their time toiling away. The focus of your life should be on enjoyment, rather than work. Yes, work is important and you will probably spend a lot of hours on your new business in its earliest stages. I'm not saying that work isn't important, but it should not be your main focus. Schedule playtime so that you can enjoy life and have time to relax. If you work your life away, you will regret it.

Small businesses should focus on psychological traits rather than strength.

Honestly, I personally believe that this is an important lesson for both small and big businesses alike, but it's essential for small businesses because they simply do not have the strength to compete on that basis. This topic reminds me of fictional heroes whom we admire. In most cases, they start out by depending on their strength alone. It works against the smaller foes but once they face their arch-nemesis, they are overpowered. That setback forces them to fall back on their psychological traits, rather than sheer strength.

Mental toughness will provide you with the courage needed to grow when you face adversity.

There are very specific qualities and attitudes that you need to hone. I would say that confidence is the most important. Success builds confidence. That is why having small step-by-step goals is so powerful. Each small step builds confidence. Another way to instantly boost your confidence is to start eating healthy and exercising. Nothing promotes confidence like being in great physical shape. Commitment and purpose are next. Setting goals gives you a purpose while having the motivation to accomplish those goals

requires commitment. Commitment also means that you always stick to your beliefs and vision. Sometimes that can become extremely difficult because adversity seems to always test our beliefs.

Success means that you find the simplest process.

So many people go into a business with the myth that creating complicated processes is the way to achieve the most success. In fact, history shows us time and time again that it's the simple processes that end up generating the most success. We all have a vision that we use to shape the world. The goal should be to simplify that vision as much as possible. The first step to making your vision come to life as simple as possible is to create small step-by-step goals. Don't skip any steps and never take shortcuts. Let us look at some methods that you can use to create a simple process.

“I’m not a tech guy. I’m looking at the technology with the eyes of my customers, normal people’s eyes.”

—Jack Ma

Your product or service should be based on a problem that you have had in your life. Back in 1995, Jack Ma visited Seattle where he was exposed to the internet for the first time. He searched for “beer” and made an important discovery – there was no data about China to be found. That’s when he decided to launch his first website and created a page called China Pages. The problem he saw was the fact that China wasn’t connected with the rest of the world.

His vision was born. He wanted to develop an e-commerce ecosystem that would allow businesses from all around the world to do business with each other online. He wanted to change China’s social and economic environment in a way that would make it the largest market in the world. The vision itself was not simple, but the way he set it up was a simple e-commerce ecosystem.

As you can see, Jack Ma took a complex vision, simplified it and became a global success.

An entrepreneur is different from a businessman.

Many people look at the two as interchangeable but there is a huge difference between an entrepreneur and a businessman. An entrepreneur is looking to improve society as a whole while a businessman is looking at how much money can be made. Entrepreneurs are the ones who create world-changing enterprises. Your vision should always be to solve problems rather than making money. Look at this quote from Jack Ma:

“I want to change history, do something important in my life, and influence individuals like we have with millions of small businesses on Alibaba. Then they love and respect you because you made their life important.”

Do you see anything in that quote about profits? Of course not! His vision was so powerful that when he turned it into reality, it took off. Profits were a side-effect of a powerful vision.

Be able to explain your products/services to anyone.

You must be able to explain your products/services to anyone in a manner that is easy to understand. Jack Ma's product was an overall simple concept, although it was difficult to achieve. The ability to describe their products/services in layman's terms is one area where a lot of new entrepreneurs struggle. I'm going to sway from the format of this book a bit to explain this topic by using a step-by-step layout. This is the only way to explain the process of creating a product description that anyone can understand.

1. Using a blank sheet of paper, create four main areas labelled physical description, features, benefits and selling point.
2. Write the physical description of the product. If it's a service, then just give a two sentence description of the service.
3. List all features of the product/service.
4. List all of the benefits that it will provide to the customer.
5. Write your unique selling point. This will generally be how the product will address a specific problem for the customer.
6. On a separate sheet of paper, combine everything you have written into a two to three sentence description. Memorize that description.

Conclusion

“30% of all people will never believe you. Do not allow your colleagues and employees to work for you. Instead, let them work for a common goal.”

—Jack Ma

Jack Ma has shown us important lessons throughout his extremely successful career.

First, he sees his biggest mistake as the time when he would limit his employee's potential rise within the company. He told them that the highest they could go would be management. All higher roles would be filled from outside of the company. Ma realized years later just how huge a mistake that was. All of his most trusted people ended up leaving the company while those who had not earned his trust were running the company as vice presidents and directors. That is when he changed his mindset. Now, he believes that attitude is far more important than capabilities.

Another valuable lesson is a question that we have all asked at one point in our lives: what does a leader possess that an employee does not possess?

“A leader should be visionary and have more foresight than an employee.”

—Jack Ma

Leaders never compare their technical skills with employees because an employee should always have superior technical skills. If not, then they hired the wrong person. What makes a leader successful is their ability to envision much further than an employee. They must be able to fight through adversity and have higher endurance than their employees. A leader's job is to lead – employees are the ones who actually perform the tasks.

Finally, Ma strongly believes that giving up is the biggest failure in life. Hardship is what molds great leaders. Only by facing those hardships can one become resilient enough to achieve success.

“It doesn’t matter if I failed. At least I passed the concept on to others. Even if I don’t succeed, someone will succeed.”

—Jack Ma

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VISIONARIES WHO CHANGED THE WORLD SERIES brings significant moments from the professional and personal lives of entrepreneurs who have had a deep impact on the business world. Their determination to meet their goals and the challenges they overcame to succeed, make their stories unique and inspirational.

From his humble beginnings, Jack Ma rose to become the richest man in China through perseverance and the belief that he would eventually succeed. Having faced rejections several times in his early life, he grew more focussed on what he wanted to do and worked ceaselessly to achieve it. At the same time, Ma emphasizes the importance of taking time off from work to enjoy life.

His unique outlook on life and work is easily replicable and will guarantee a fulfilling life.

George Ilian has made his mark on the digital industry, owning an e-book business among other endeavours. He is the author of 18 books in the genre of business and motivation.

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