



Art of Leading

Powerful insights from top leaders.



If You Have The Right Team, You'll Be Able To Fight Through Tough Moments

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Alex Rodriguez



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Alex Rodriguez, founder and CEO of A-Rod Corp, an investment firm, shared key leadership insights from his baseball and business careers in my latest "Art of Leading" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.

Q. What are the leadership muscles from your sports career that have translated well to running a business?

A. Endurance is a big one. Baseball is a marathon, not a sprint. We played 162 games in a season, so the fact that you have to show up every day is a lot like business. Some days are good, some are not so good, and it's impossible to be at 10 out of 10 on the energy scale every day.

Q. What are the keys to successful leadership for you?

A. If you pick the right talent, you're halfway there. The other part is that you have to sincerely cheerlead and be a fan of your teammates to help them win. If you don't have that, people will see right through that and perceive you as more of a self-serving leader.

You have to be able to mentor and bring people along for the ride. And that ride is never a straight line. There are going to be ups and downs. But if you have the right talent, then you're going to be able to roll and pivot and fight through some difficult moments.

*I've learned the power of
silence and listening.*

I've learned the power of silence and listening. Pat Riley is one of my great friends and mentors. He talked to me early on about how a lot of coaches never stop talking. You lose the weight of your words when you do that. You have to be selective, prepared and clear about your message. A lot of leaders are great talkers but not-so-great listeners, and talented people have a lot to say if you give them space.

Q. Who were important influences that informed your leadership style today?

A. I've had some life-changing mentors, starting with my mother, and people like Eddie Rodriguez, who's been coaching at the Boys and Girls Club for over 40 years. He's had over 50 Major League Baseball players come through his program.

But I've also had mentors who had specific approaches or attributes that I wanted to emulate. I might have fundamentally disagreed with 80 percent of the way they do things, but there was one important thing that I could learn from them. Sometimes people are so quick in our society to just cancel someone because they have one flaw. What they forget is that there are things they may do better than anyone.

Q. Given all the challenges that leaders face today, the ability to compartmentalize is an important skill — something that you had

to master in your baseball career. Can you share your tips on how to do that well?

A. Some people are just genetically better at it than others, but I do think you can work on it and improve. It's really about poise and keeping your eye on the ball, and the goals you've set for yourself.

It's never a straight road. Tough losses are going to come, unexpected errors are going to come, but in the long term, if you practice good character, good habits, and you stay focused and humble, you're going to have way more wins than losses.

In baseball, you're not going to win all 162 games in a season. It's impossible. It's never been done. But if you keep a cool head and you have great fundamentals and a fantastic attitude with a good work ethic, then you're probably going to win 100 and lose 62, and that makes you a first-place team.

Q. How do you interview job candidates?

A. The only people I hire now are part of my senior team, and it would be a lot more than one interview. It would probably be five to seven meetings. I want to take you to a social gathering and maybe to a ball game.

I want to know as much I can about you, and to make sure that our values and our missions are aligned. I would also take you to a couple restaurants to see how you treat the waitress or waiter. My mother was

a waitress, and it's really important to me that everyone is treated with respect.

I also want to find out if you're a missionary or a mercenary.

I also want to find out if you're a missionary or a mercenary. I want someone who is mission-driven — someone who wants to do well but also believes that it's important to do good in the world. It's important that it's not just about ROI, and that it's about doing work that fits your vision and your values. A mercenary is someone who would do anything at all cost to get the absolute last dollar. That's someone we don't want working for this organization.

Q. What other career and life advice would you give to MBA students in their 20s?

A. From age 20 to 30, you should look at jobs as an extension of the MBA. The last thing you should worry about is how much you're being paid. What matters is who you work for. Do they believe in you? Can they add value to your career? Will they bring you into meetings where you can learn from senior leaders?

It's about getting your at-bats, rather just sitting on the bench, even if you're making more money. You have to seek out the right team and the right culture. Even if you can make more money doing another job, the opportunity to learn from leaders like Bill Belichick, Joe Torre and

Pat Riley will be priceless.

I also find that people can be in too much of a hurry. The younger generation today wants results first. I love the ambition, but at the same time, there has to be kind of a blue-collar approach of putting one step in front of the other and getting experience.