

# Sir Richard Branson Leadership Style



This article is about “Sir Richard Branson leadership style”. Whilst Sir Richard Branson is a British Entrepreneur, he’s also an internationally recognised entrepreneur too. He is the type of entrepreneur who’s a natural born leader and business creator. Also, despite the fact he lives in the British Virgin Island, his favourite country is still the UK.

Founder of the Virgin Group and an entrepreneur who is not afraid of the limelight. In fact, Branson is always in the spot light in his quirky way of promoting his internationally recognised brand. The Virgin brand dates back to the 1970’s and now provides Sir Richard Branson with an estimate net worth of \$5.1 billion (2017).

## Why Sir Richard Branson Leadership Style?

- *Sir Richard Branson* is on the favourites list of most entrepreneurs – he certainly is on mine.
- There’s a lot to be learned from the *King of Entrepreneurship* for any entrepreneur in the world.
- He’s *the entrepreneur to aspire to...* so well worth writing about.

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## So what is Sir Richard Branson's Leadership Style? Be a rule breaker...

The *first leadership trait of Branson* is to be a rule-breaker. Saying that he'd never learned the rules in the first place, makes it easier to break them. Changing the game is at the heart of what Virgin stands for... "*Don't sweat it: rules were meant to be broken.*" is the company culture.

Whilst Branson appreciates the need to have a framework in place, together with procedures and rules, he's keen to not let these get in the way of customer service. He says that rules are really made to be broken, and the rule book should not be an excuse for poor customer service or an obstacle to great service.

He sees the rules as flexible guidelines. The customer is not always right, but nor is the rule book. As a leader, Branson encourages his staff to strike a balance between what services the customer and what's in the company's best interest too.

He is keen on empowering customer contact staff to use a common sense approach.

## Be a leader...not a boss...

In his book '*Like a Virgin*' he has a chapter on being a leader. Branson makes reference to the only situations where being 'the boss' works is as an 'organised crime boss', union boss' or a 'pit boss'. He has never seen the attribute of being bossy as a desirable trait to have for any manager. To avoid the usual hierarchical setup of many businesses, Branson prefers the open-plan office style. He likes to have lots of communal brainstorming spaces, lounges, play areas, pool tables and kitchen areas. He's keen that co-workers have a great workplace and naturally come together to chew the fat.

As far as Branson is concerned, office walls, doors, desks and counters are nothing but barriers to communication.

"A Good corporate leader should draw opinions and ideas out of their associates." *Sir Richard Branson – Like a Virgin Book.*

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A leadership style of leading from the front...



Branson considers a leader to be a completely different animal to a boss. As far as Branson's concerned, in the same way as a great general should lead his troops to the battle field, a great *business leader* should do the same with his company.

Branson encourages his executives and managers to step away from their desks and to get to know their staff. Where the company is too big for regular meetings, he suggests spending a few hours handling customer complaints and working on the factory floor. This way you'll really understand what's going on in your business.

“Respect is how to treat everyone, not just those you want to impress.” *Sir Richard Branson.*

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An example of this *leadership style* from Branson, was when he took over Northern Rock bank. He spent several days meeting the people of Northern Rock in the various offices around the UK. Keen to create a 'family-spirit' in any of his businesses, he was pleased to see this already existed at Northern Rock.

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Branson's pet hate as a leader...



Richard Branson's pet hate as a leader...  
Employees saying "Okay, you're the boss."

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Branson hates anyone saying to him: "Okay, you're the boss." Why this irks him so much, is effectively the person is saying "I don't agree with you, but will roll over and do it because you're telling me to." Branson encourages you to stop the person in their tracks, and to say to their response "Not really, we're all in this together. So come back here and tell me what you'd be doing with this if you were in my place."

"You shouldn't blindly accept a leaders advice. You've got to question leaders on occasion." *Sir Richard Branson.*

**Related Article Link:** [Besoz is known for sending the 'Question Mark'. Yes that's right a single '?' on an email to an unsuspecting employee.](#)

This demonstrates his keenness to work with people and to encourage *good leadership.*

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## Be involved in hiring for leadership...

In an interview with Dan Schawbel, Branson tells about how he hires his weaknesses. He is more keen on hiring a person with a great personality and who has broad experience than someone who doesn't, but is well educated.

Branson's style is to take chances on people and he's always keen to hire from within the company. Promoting staff in this way sends a good message to the rest of the staff. This method of recruiting encourages great leadership.

## Invest in your people...

Top of the Virgin Brand is providing excellent customer service. The cost of getting a new customer is always more expensive than retaining existing customers. So Branson is keen to invest in his people, as they are the ones who have direct contact with customers.

Customer service is about people interaction, if the people are not happy, they'll likely provide a bad customer experience too.

Additionally, Branson is keen to provide good training and for his people to have the tools they need to do the job. He encourages people to take training-days and to develop their skills during working hours.



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Leading by example...



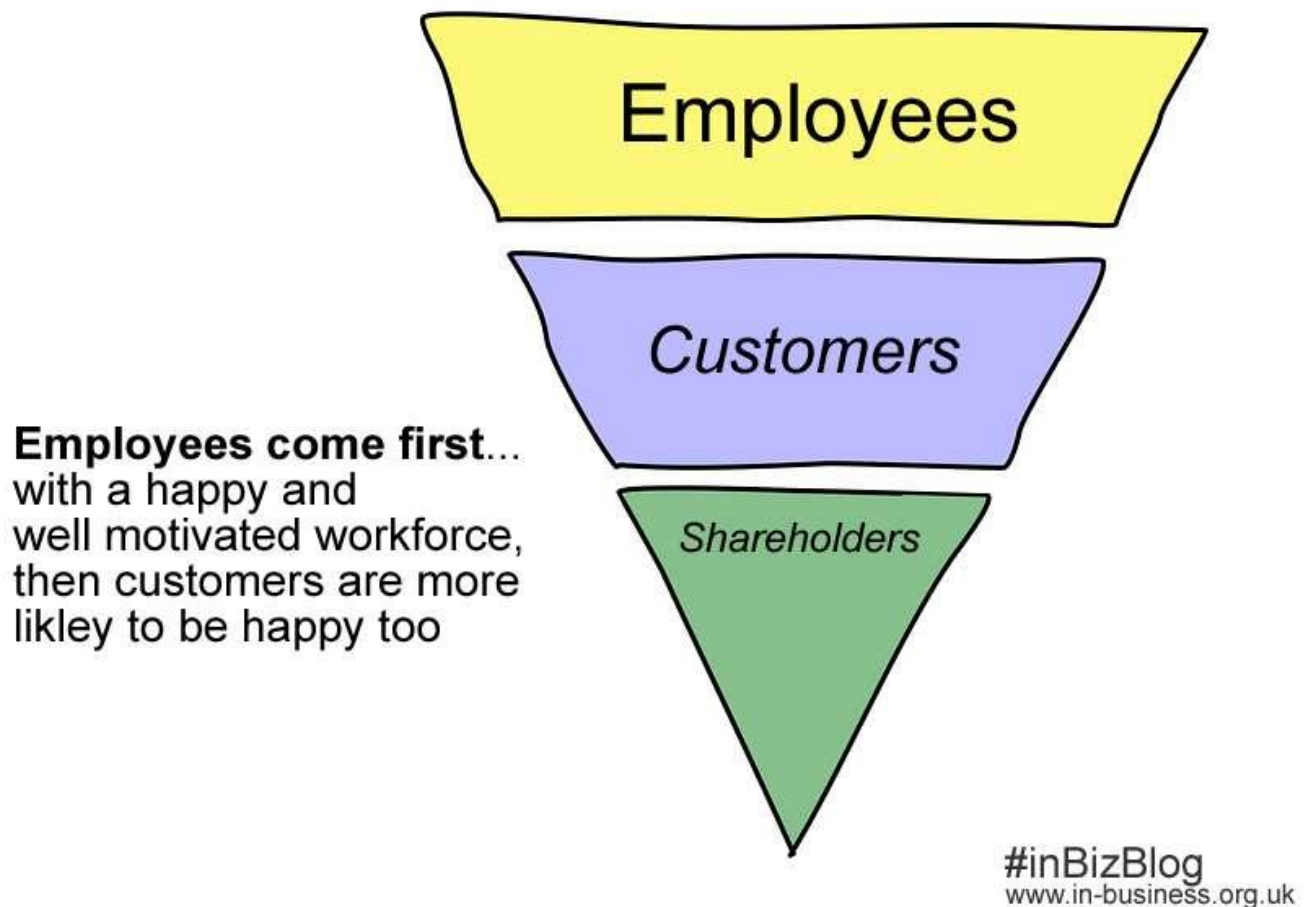
Keeping staff motivated and happy is key to a company's success in Sir Richard Branson's eyes. One great motivator is for staff to follow your lead and to take a break.

By a break I mean a holiday. He's keen that they follow their outside interests too. Both of these will help to retain the most valuable team members, but not only that, this will lead to more creativity and innovation.

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Turning the pyramid on its head...

## Richard Branson's Virgin Group and turning the pyramid on its head...



Sir Richard Branson is known for not following convention, and this is another example of this. Most businesses put their shareholders needs first, followed by customers, with employees last of all. But at Virgin, this is where the pyramid is turned on its head. At all Virgin Group companies their employees come first, then their customers, with the shareholders last.

“Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients.” *Richard Branson.*

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As already discussed, if the workforce are happy and well motivated, customers are likely to be happy too. Thereby the company is more likely to see strong sales and good profits, which will ultimately please the shareholders in any case.

## Keeping your team informed...

A well informed team will allow team members to make their own decisions.

By communicating the company's objectives on a regular basis will help to achieve this objective, where Branson takes a lead from Tony Blair and how he would communicate his overall strategic approach for the year, and he would set clear objectives for each department.

## Business, like life, should be fun...



Branson strives to keep bureaucracy to a minimum and is always keen to remind his teams that like life, business should be fun. He also encourages self-deprecating humour, which in his mind is a way of retaining and attracting customers.

A typical example of this is that you'll find on the bottom of all the salt and pepper pots on his Virgin Atlantic planes, in the shape of mini-jumbo jets, "*Stolen from Virgin.*"

## What is Richard Branson's key to success?



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In his own words it is people, people, people. In the forward of 'Like a Virgin' book, this was his answer to the question 'the key to success in three words.'

This bears out in his *leadership style*. Putting his employees at the top of the pyramid is one of his keys to success.