
Summary And Analysis Of “Five Leadership Lessons From James T. Kirk”

Summary

In his article “Five Leadership Lessons From James T. Kirk”, published in 2012, Alex Knapp offers five leadership lessons businesses could learn from a fictional show about a vessel named The Enterprise and the adventures its crew and captain, James T. Kirk, go on. The audience is first introduced to Kirk as “one of the most famous Captains in the history of Starfleet”. Kirk has been through it all, saving his home planet Earth, negotiating peace with another race of beings, stopping a deadly device, the list goes on.

The very first lesson the audience can learn, is to never stop learning. Knowledge is power, and you never know when you might need it. He uses the example of Kirk having to build a shotgun on a whim to defeat a Gorn Captain. With knowledge comes different backgrounds, perspectives and opinions, but making sure those who mentor you have different views on the world can make for even better ideas and plans. Knapp explains Kirk’s relationship with his two advisors Commander Spock and Dr. Leonard McCoy, who come from very different pasts and have different ways of thinking. Even though their differences might make them butt heads, three minds are better than one. Knapp explains that Kirk was always on the frontline with his men, something that many leaders fail to do, as they get caught up in having assistants, having a cushy office, having never-ending meetings and decisions. By doing this, Kirk was able to identify the capabilities of his team, could help determine the best way out of a predicament, and by being with his team gained their trust. He continues by insisting that instead of leadership being like chess, leadership should be like poker: a game with bluffs, being able to understand your opponent, and being able to use your opponent’s weakness against them. He uses the example of a made-up substance called “corbomite” which was said to reflect any weapon’s energy back against the attacker, this allowed the crew on the Enterprise to make an alliance with the First Federation.

Last, but not least, with time comes change. He exemplifies Kirk blowing up the Enterprise, Kirk’s first love, to defeat a band of Klingons attacking him and to save his crew. This means don’t be afraid to travel down a new path when the one you are on isn’t feasible anymore.

Analysis

For Captain Kirk from Star Trek, what makes him so successful as a leader comes from inside of him, and his way of commanding is the reason why he prospers time and time again. In “Five Leadership Lessons From James T. Kirk”, author Alex Knapp argues that anyone can learn aspects of how to be a great leader like Captain Kirk. Knapp claims that not everyone was born to be a leader but can become one by appealing to his audience using organizational style, appeal to logos and examples with familiarity. Knapp organizes his article by formatting it in a way business people are familiar with. The use of a formal introduction to what the subject is, to the clearly outlined five different lessons, to the conclusion, this type of format is very similar to a business memo which businessmen would be accustomed to reading. These memos are

typically straight to the point and often short and sweet. Knapp also does not go into a lot of detail with each lesson, he simply states it, provides a quote from Captain Kirk, gives an example from the show and writes a short conclusion. He follows this exact same pattern throughout the article, so the reader knows what to expect with every lesson they read. Since business people would not read this article to pass time or to be entertained, Knapp organizes and writes his article in a clear, concise and easy to read format to appeal to his audience of business people. Knapp's use of Kirk from Star Trek is used appeal to his audience through familiarity of his examples. What person has never heard of the infamous "Star Trek" or has never attempted the Vulcan salute Mr. Spock made famous? This series is iconic and will be remembered for generations because of its action, adventure and now remakes of the original show. Knapp's use of relating business lessons to a familiar and popular form of media is what makes his appeal to his audience so successful. Making leadership lesson connections from a less popular or newer show gives you a lesser chance of connecting with this audience since business people are typically older.

This article will also apply in the future since this series will be remembered for many years to come, appealing to a large range of audiences. When thinking of business people, it is often agreed that they are generally very logical thinkers and workers. It is no surprise then that Knapp incorporates logical arguments throughout this essay to appeal to his audience. At the end of each lesson given Knapp argues his point with logos to make his reference parallel to situations that could happen in daily life. In his first lesson he references a scene where Kirk must fight a Gorn captain using prior knowledge. Of course, no person in real life will ever have to fight a humanoid-reptilian species, but Knapp argues that "no matter what your organization does, it helps to never stop learning". In this case Kirk's prior knowledge was the reason for the team's success, but this lesson could also be helpful in a business meeting or sale if last minute knowledge was needed. Even though each lesson is from a fictional show with made up scenarios this doesn't mean you can not use the same logic in everyday life.

Knapp was successful at appealing to his audience to help them learn leadership lessons by using a familiar and popular television show, organizing his article like a business memo and using logos to make his argument more logical and applicable to daily life. His use of "Star Trek" to identify with his audience using a familiar television show was successful because most people have watched or have at least heard of the show. His organization method further appeals to his audience by making it similar to something his audience would read on a daily basis. Lastly, his appeal to logos applies to his audience's way of thinking as business people are very logical. This makes this article easily readable and enjoyable for business people to learn from.