

Why Pope Francis Is So Effective: 8 Lessons for Every Leader

1. Reach out to non-customers.

Peter Drucker famously [noted](#) that every organization has more non-customers than customers, and that you can learn more from the people who aren't buying your product than from those who are. At 1.2 billion adherents, the Catholic Church has what you might call a huge [customer base](#), but Francis makes sure to reach out to non-Catholics as well, for instance by declaring that God has redeemed all of us, not just Catholics.

"That simple leadership tenet may be the best way to increase market share," Krames says.

2. Embrace risk.

When Francis was young, he became very ill, and the nun who tended him disobeyed the doctor's instructions and tripled his dose of antibiotics, because she knew from experience that without that higher dose he would die. "He uses that as an example of living on the frontier," Krames says.

You can't be an effective leader if [you're always playing it safe](#), he adds. "Living on the frontier is something the pope has to do every day."

3. Reinvent your organization.

"Don't change--reinvent!" Krames advises. "Pope Francis is a fearless reformer. He has taken on just about every faction of the Catholic Church in order to make it a more inclusive religion."

The best leaders do the same, he adds. "They do not [fear change](#)--they know when changing a few things is not enough. They reinvent their organizations in an ever-changing global marketplace."

4. Be patient.

Though reinvention is essential, "Authentic change doesn't take weeks or months, it takes years," Krames says. Francis has shown by his timing that he understands this, Krames adds. "For example, it was almost his one-year anniversary before he reportedly commented that divorced and remarried people could receive Holy Communion." He knows that such paradigm changes can happen only over the long term, Krames says.

5. Get in the field.

"Francis hates any members of the clergy who sit in offices and push paper," Krames says. As a bishop in Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio (as he was then), would dress as a plain priest and go out at night to talk with people. "When he became pope he told one of his archbishops, 'I can't do that anymore, so you're going to do it for me.' He doesn't want a pristine church, he wants a church that's going out in the streets to find people and help them." Likewise, Francis famously chose not to move into the papal apartments but to remain in a guest suite at the Vatican, "to live in community with others," according to a Vatican representative.

In the same way, the most effective business leaders are those who keep in touch with [as many constituents](#) as they can. [Delegating](#) is a necessary part of leadership, but don't hand

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off all contact with lower-level employees or customers. Otherwise, you may find yourself isolated and out of touch.

6. Listen to diverse voices.

It's much too easy for business leaders to surround themselves with like-minded advisors and leave it at that, Krames says. While that can be comfortable and efficient, it will tend to reinforce the [status quo](#), which is not good for any organization over time.

"What the pope has done to avoid being insular is create the Vatican Eight [V8]," Krames says. That's a group of advisors including cardinals from the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia, as well as Europe, plus one Vatican official. "To me, it's his board of directors," Krames says. "They're from all over the world, and they consult with him to help him make decisions. He wants to get other people's opinions."

7. Put the organization's goals above your own.

"The qualities that help send people to the top of organizations fly in the face of humility," Krames says. "They're full of confidence and bravado, and these are not terms Pope Francis approves of in a leader." In the long run, though, setting your organization's goals above your own will build a more powerful organization and benefit you as its leader.

Krames says that's what Bergoglio did in 2005, when he was the only strong contender against Joseph Ratzinger to become pope after the death of John Paul II. Through the successive ballots papal elections often require, Bergoglio reportedly encouraged his supporters to vote for Ratzinger instead of fighting it out. "He decided that would be bad, because it would have taken extra days to decide, and he didn't think that was good for the church," Krames says. (Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI but resigned in 2013 due to ill health.)

8. Lead by example.

As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio recruited priests to go into the city's most dangerous slums, the villas miserias. In these places, the collar does not offer much protection; priests have been kidnapped, tortured and murdered. Still, Bergoglio often showed up unannounced to drink tea with parishioners and to support local priests. And in 2009, when one of his priests received a death threat for having spoken out against drugs in one of the villas, Bergoglio walked the streets, providing himself as a target and a dare for anyone wanting to retaliate. "They were never bothered again," Krames says.