

# 7 Traits of Exceptional CEOs

CEOs possess a distinctive combination of traits that set them apart as effective and inspiring leaders. Drawing from our extensive search work and numerous discussions with investors, board members, and C-suite leaders across public and private domains, we have identified the following as some of their quintessential characteristics.



## **Team builders** → Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft

CEOs excel as team builders when fostering a collaborative environment that leverages diverse talents that work seamlessly towards shared goals.

Nadella transformed the company's culture by encouraging teamwork and a growth mindset, leading to increased innovation and a resurgence in the company's market position.



## **On building successful teams**

I think of the following: who's going to bring a different viewpoint, a different life experience, or who's going to help us shake things up a little bit more? This is a mentality that makes the team stronger and has paid dividends for us.

**Jack Callison**  
CEO, Sunrise Senior Living



## **Strategic thinkers** → Jeff Bezos, Founder & Former CEO, Amazon

CEOs are visionary strategic thinkers when adept at setting long-term goals and navigating complex business landscapes.

Bezos revolutionized e-commerce and cloud computing by constantly anticipating market trends and strategically investing in new technologies.



## **Integrity & trust** → Mary Barra, CEO, General Motors

CEOs who have integrity and are trustworthy build strong, ethical foundations for their organizations.

Barra consistently prioritizes ethical practices and transparency. Her leadership in handling the company's recall crisis and commitment to transforming GM into a leader in electric vehicles has garnered respect and trust from employees, stakeholders, and customers alike.



## **Adaptability & change** → Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google

CEOs who demonstrate adaptability and embrace change are crucial in navigating their companies through evolving market trends and landscapes.

Under Pichai's leadership, Google has diversified its product offerings and invested heavily in AI and machine learning, adapting to fast-paced technological advancements and maintaining its position at the forefront of innovation.



### **Resiliency** → Howard Schultz, Former CEO, Starbucks

CEOs who showcase resiliency are adept at steering through crises and setbacks while maintaining vision and inspiring their teams.

During the 2008 financial crisis, Schultz led the company through a challenging period by focusing on improving the customer experience and investing in store renovations. His ability to position Starbucks through financial difficulties and emerge stronger showcased his sticktoitiveness and commitment to the company's long-term success.

### **On delivering results**

When I look for CEOs, they need a track record of delivering results multiple times that can be attributed to them and their work. People are on the bus who claim credit for that, so you have to really sift through and figure out, "Okay, what did I drive?" You can't be a one-hit-wonder. Having a solid track record is very important.

**Farhan Siddiqi**  
Operating Partner, Baypine



### **Operational excellence** → Tim Cook, CEO, Apple

CEOs who exhibit operational excellence are skilled at streamlining processes and optimizing performance to drive efficiency and growth.

Cook's focus on refining Apple's supply chain and manufacturing processes has significantly improved the company's operational efficiency. His meticulous approach has enabled Apple to scale production while maintaining high product quality, contributing to continued success and profitability.



### **Results focus** → David G. Zaslav, CEO, Warner Bros. Discovery

CEOs with a strong results focus are driven by achieving measurable outcomes and consistently delivering on performance targets.

Under Zaslav's leadership, Warner Bros. Discovery has successfully executed transformative mergers and acquisitions, delivering significant growth and value creation for private equity investors. His results-oriented approach has been critical in integrating diverse assets and enhancing overall efficiency, leading to substantial returns for stakeholders.

