

Becca Kleinstein on Martha Stewart

Yes, you read that correctly – I chose Martha Stewart as the leader I admire. I'm guessing that quizzical look on your face has something to do with the fact that she spent 5 months in federal prison, or that she is known for being a ruthless tyrant in the professional domain, or even the fact that it is very publicly known that she and her daughter don't get along (her daughter even wrote a book about their poor relationship!). However, Martha Stewart possesses several leadership traits that I admire and she has been able to harmonize all four of her domains.

Marth Kostyra was born in 1941, and was raised in New Jersey by her middle class parents with her four brothers and sisters. Her knack for crafts was obvious from her childhood as she learned crafting, gardening, sewing, cooking, and preserve-jarring from her close-knit Polish American family. Her planning was also evident in her youth. She frequently babysat for the children of Mickey Mantle of the New York Yankees and organized birthday parties for the four boys.

Martha won partial scholarship to Barnard College and modeled on the side to pay expenses. She initially intended to major in chemistry, but switched to art, European history, and architectural history. She married then law student Andrew Stewart after her sophomore year in college, and after taking a year off from school, earned her degree. Martha had her only child, Alexis, in 1965, and worked as model and stockbroker on Wall Street until 1973.

In 1973 Martha and Andrew moved to Westport, CT where the couple completely restored an 1805 farmhouse that would become the model for the set of the Martha Stewart Living show. Martha also started a catering business in her basement which within a decade became a \$1 Million enterprise – and would ultimately be her ticket to fame! Her husband was a book publisher and hired Martha's company to cater a book release party in New York City. At the event Martha was introduced to Alan Mirken, head of Crown Publishing Group. Mirken was impressed with Martha's talent and later contracted her to publish her first cookbook, *Entertaining*, which is now in its 30th Edition.

Following the success of her first cookbook, Martha released several additional titles, including *Martha Stewart's Quick Cook* (1983), *Weddings* (1987), *Martha Stewart's Quick Cook Menus* (1988), and *Martha Stewart's Christmas* (1989), among others. She also wrote dozens of newspaper and magazine articles on homemaking, and made numerous television appearances on programs such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Larry King Live*. In 1989, Marth and Andrew divorced.

The 1990's was incredible decade for Martha Stewart's success. In 1990 she launched her own magazine, *Martha Stewart Living*, serving as Editor-in-Chief. In 1992, *Martha Stewart Living TV* launched as a weekly half-hour syndicated show, and in 1997 Martha founded *Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia* and was named chairwoman, CEO, and president of the enterprise. She also partnered with Kmart to exclusively launch *Martha Stewart Everyday* collections. Finally, in 1999, *Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia* went public on the New York Stock Exchange, making Martha Stewart a billionaire on paper (as majority shareholder).

If the 1990's represented Martha's rise, then the early 2000's certainly represented her fall. According to U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, to avoid a loss of ~\$45,000, Martha Stewart sold her 3,000 shares of *ImClone Systems* stock on in 2001 following the receipt of material, nonpublic information from her Merrill Lynch broker. In 2003, Martha was indicted by the government. She voluntarily stepped down as CEO and Chairwoman of *Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia*, but stayed on as chief creative officer. Martha went on trial in January 2004, and was sentenced to five months in federal prison in West Virginia. She was publicly scrutinized, grilled, and condemned by many. However, true to Martha's tenacity, spirit, and fight, she would not fade into the abyss.

Upon her release in 2005, Martha launched a tremendous comeback campaign – thus, 2005-2012 can be known as her “rise again”. In 2005 Martha Stewart Living Radio launches on Sirius Satellite Radio and NBC syndicates The Martha Stewart Show. In 2006 MSLO and KB Home unveiled their first co-branded community of model homes in North Carolina. In 2007, The Martha Stewart Collection launched exclusively at Macy's nationwide. In 2009, Martha reached 1 million followers on Twitter; In 2010 Martha Stewart launched a strategic partnership with the Hallmark Channel, and in April 2012 Martha will make her acting debut on Law & Order SVU.

Obviously Martha Stewart has had an amazing journey, and the dichotomy in terms of the public's perception of her is astounding. On one hand, she is a classic American icon of female success in the workplace. She is an adored television and radio personality, she is revered for her style and charm, and she shattered the glass ceiling. However, on the other hand, she seems to be the woman we love to hate. She is known to be a perfectionist, an aggressively ruthless businesswoman, and of course a convicted criminal.

So why did I choose Martha Stewart as someone who I believe espouses total leadership? The following quote from Martha Stewart's website sums it up well: “We believe that an appreciation and mastery of the home arts and domestic sciences, nutrition, and horticulture are key building blocks that foster individual self-esteem, strengthen family, and build community while promoting economic well-being.” Her passion for crafts, creativity, and perfection are the threads that run through everything she does – in all of the domains of her life.

Looking more closely at each of her domains, it is clear to see the common themes:

Work

- Leveraged the creative skills that she learned as a child to launch her career
- Martha IS Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia – she is the creative mastermind and lives it everyday
- Used her network to achieve success
- Perfectionism / very high standards

Self

- Resilient drive for success and unstoppable passion
- Truly lives her craft
- Strong value system
- Takes time to refresh her body and mind (wakes up before her roosters to exercise)
- Perfectionism / very high standards

Home

- Is the top executive of her household
- Her homes reflect her passion for perfectionism
- Self-made woman who doesn't try to be someone she's not
- Perfectionism / very high standards

Community

- The Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia Foundation seeks to “turn dreamers into doers”

- The Foundation targets programs that afford women and families access to the knowledge and resources they need to build better lives.

Overall the lessons I gleaned off of learning about Martha Stewart are (each supported by a quote from Martha):

- **Pursue your passion:** “All the things I love is what my business is all about.”
- **Know your values:** “I think it’s very important that whatever you’re trying to make or sell, or teach has to be basically good. A bad product and you know what? You won’t be here in ten years.”
- **Be true to yourself:** “My new motto is: When you’re through changing, you’re through.”
- **Exploit your network:** “Many of my executives have worked with me since the beginning. I can be fair and decisive and encouraging as well as demanding.”

Sources:

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Five-Essential-Leadership-Traits:-The-Story-Of-Martha-Stewart-From-Kmart-To-Macys&id=461813>

"U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission pancakes". www.sec.gov. www.sec.gov. Retrieved 4 June 2003.

<http://www.marthastewart.com/274830/the-martha-timeline#/196257>

<http://www.marthastewart.com/275064/marthas-scrapbook#/229678>

<http://www.realityblurred.com/exposed/issues/media/marthastewart/http://abcnews.go.com/Health/martha-stewarts-daughter-writes-perfectionist-mother-made-home/story?id=14642920&page=2#.T3idW6vYe80>

<http://www.marthastewart.com/martha-stewart-foundation>

<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=96022&p=irol-homeprofile>

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_45/b4008076.htm

<http://dreamers.marthastewart.com/profiles/blogs/intentionphilanthropy-1>

<http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/martha-stewart-dishes-empire-prison-rachel-ray-exclusive/story?id=9106551&page=4#.T3iesKvYe80>

http://www.woopidoo.com/business_quotes/authors/martha-stewart-quotes.htm

<http://www.harley.com/writing/martha-stewart.html>

<http://www.essortment.com/biography-martha-stewart-20828.html>

<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=96022&p=irol-reportsannual>

<http://www.money-zine.com/Career-Development/Leadership-Skill/Autocratic-Leadership/>