

# Growing strong: Five digital leadership lessons from the *Game of Thrones*

By [Lee Naik](#)

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*"When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground."*

It's a quote that aptly sums up the cutthroat world of *Game of Thrones*, but one that I often find myself thinking about when considering the unforgiving digital marketplace. Fail to play the digital game and your company will find itself facing a nasty fate indeed.

In fact, watching this season's *Game of Thrones*, I can't help but see the world of Westeros and our own as surprisingly similar. Sure, there are fewer shadow assassins and dragons in our world, but we both find ourselves facing major forces of disruption.

Thankfully, our own disruptive forces are more beneficial than the marching white walkers, but there are still a few important leadership lessons we can take from Westeros.



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## Tradition won't save you

It doesn't matter how old and venerated you are in *Game of Thrones*, no-one is safe in Westeros, not even the kings and queens themselves. Those leaders who allow themselves to get comfortable, thinking they're safe because of the traditions they surround themselves with, are the ones who inevitably lose their heads – often literally.

Compare Ned and his unwillingness to compromise with the more agile Lannisters, who are at their peak when Tyrion is given free rein. Old business models are losing out to more nimble enterprises who are able to get product to market faster and [respond to change](#).

## Back the right house

Alliances are a huge part of building and maintaining power in *Game of Thrones*. Get the right house to support you and you'll be able to stave off the worst that your enemies have to offer. The same is true in today's platform-based economy – those companies that stand alone are the most in danger of falling to ruin.

In a platform economy, having strong digital partnerships is like having a powerful house behind you. The capabilities a company needs to have on hand to innovate in such a fast-paced, hyperconnected world are staggering. Working in a [partner ecosystem model](#) allows for the scale and agility necessary to be able to deliver real-time customer experiences, as well as [create bold new innovations](#).

## Anticipate the disruptive threats

Winter is coming. Everyone on the show already knows this and yet they consistently choose to ignore it and rather focus on their own petty battles. While not everyone might know of the peril of the white walkers, the signs are there that something big is coming over the Wall.



Image via Twitter

For real world enterprises, the changing digital landscape can seem as alien and daunting as an army of ice zombies. But [transformation](#), like the white walkers, doesn't have to be a surprise. Unlike the Night's Watch, we have the tools to be able to predict how disruption might change businesses, markets and even whole industries.

## Knowledge is power

At the heart of these tools is data. Just why is it that Littlefinger – a rather minor figure among the great houses of Westeros – wields so much influence? It's because through his network of spies and informants, he knows practically everything that goes on in the Kingdom and can adapt his own plans accordingly.

Data is even more critical in the real world, where markets live and die on accurate insights and predictions. Companies that embed analytics into their decision-making processes enjoy the [fruits of better performance](#) across their whole organisation.

## Think young

Jon. Daenerys. Arya. It's the young who are taking charge in Westeros, trying to either create their individual paths to happiness or take up their family legacies in their own unique way. When the dust settles and the battles are won, it is they who are likely to be standing at the end of the series.

Similarly, some of the most disruptive companies in the world are the likes of Uber, Tesla and Spotify. Start-ups and newbies are out-manoeuvring their larger, slower competitors, shaping what the future of their respective industries look like. And within enterprises themselves, it is often [millennials](#) that are driving innovation and change.

As you fight your own digital battles, you need to ask who the Jon Snows – those visionary young heroes that drive innovation – are in your organisation. What alliances are you putting in place to help you face the winter?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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