

Defining Leadership

An Interview with John Kasich, Founder, Kasich Company

EDITORS' NOTE Before founding Kasich Company, John Kasich served two terms as the Governor of Ohio. He served as a member of Congress from central Ohio for 18 years and, as the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, he led the effort to balance the federal budget for the first time since 1969 and helped enact historic welfare reform. After leaving Congress in 2000, Kasich worked as a managing director in the Investment Banking Division of Lehman Brothers, where he helped companies secure the resources they needed to succeed and create jobs. He was also a commentator for FOX News, a Presidential Fellow at his alma mater, The Ohio State University, and a candidate for the Republican nomination in the 2000 and 2016 Presidential campaigns. Kasich is the author of four New York Times best-sellers: *Courage is Contagious*; *Stand for Something: The Battle for America's Soul*; and *Every Other Monday*, which was published in 2010 and focuses on the importance of faith in making both everyday choices and life-changing decisions. His most recent books are *Two Paths: America Divided or United* and *It's Up to Us – Ten Little Ways We Can Bring About Big Change*. Today, he also serves as a senior commentator for CNN.



John Kasich

COMPANY BRIEF The Kasich Company, (kasiccompanyllc.com), co-founded by John Kasich and Beth Hansen, connects and convenes their unique international network of leaders to effectively address its clients' pain points and opportunities. Kasich Company offers its clients the expertise of public-sector leaders with private-sector capabilities who work to develop results-oriented, common-sense and unifying approaches to solving problems at the federal, state and local level.

What have been your main areas of focus since you left public office in January 2019?

I'm involved in many different things. I'm a senior commentator for CNN and I'm also speaking to universities, businesses and organizations across the country. I'm actively working on efforts to alleviate poverty and signed on to fight climate change with John Kerry and Arnold Schwarzenegger. In addition, I'm interested in helping to improve the mental health

system and continue to be engaged in addressing healthcare. I am also starting to spend a significant amount of time working in the technology sector.

Is there an effective understanding in the country around the issue of poverty?

No, I don't think there is. I think people need to put themselves in somebody else's shoes, because sometimes poverty is cultural. It's not that way because people don't want to change their situation or condition. In many respects, they don't know how, and then poverty can become embedded in a culture that, in many respects, doesn't give people the opportunity to climb out of it.

Do I think people want to climb out of it? They absolutely do. Sometimes they just don't understand how to do it, and I'm an optimist about the ability to help people find a better life.

One of the things about the World War Zero coalition that I'm helping with to fight climate change is what we are trying to do is not have specific solutions at this point, but to be able to get people to sit down and recognize the challenges that we have and begin to grow solutions from the middle out, rather than from the outside in. In other words, this is going to come from a consensus of reasonable people who say, yes there are reasonable things that we can do.

What are the keys to addressing the challenges in healthcare?

We need to deal with the huge administrative costs. That is low-hanging fruit, since with technology we can figure out better systems to be more efficient and this will start stripping out costs.

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Will you discuss your work around climate change?

We are seeing a number of companies in the private sector focusing on the principles of ESG – environmental, social, governance. I've had conversations with a number of CEOs whose companies are beginning to put their shoulder to the wheel on this issue. They are not waiting for the government to tell them what to do.

When it comes to government, the problem is an inability to form a consensus, not just on this issue, but on the issue of debt and how to reform our healthcare system to make it more affordable, and many other issues. They are just all stuck.

take care of us when we are sick. There needs to be a situation where people are willing to take some risks, providers are willing to take risks, insurance companies are willing to take risks, to say that we can keep people healthier than what is anticipated or expected. We did some of that in Ohio and it was effective.

What can be done to bring civility back to the country?

Most people aren't on the political extremes, they are actually pretty much in the center. Human beings don't usually favor revolution unless the situation becomes intolerable. They really favor evolution, not revolution.

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I don't think most people want to be fighting with one another. In fact, it's human nature to want to huddle together. I believe the natural feeling is one of wanting to be together. There have been family members that fight with each other about politics, and we're the ones that just have to put a stop to it. You can have your opinion. I don't want to fight with

Do you feel that leadership can be taught?

I think maybe to a degree. I think leadership is the ability to walk a very lonely road. It's the ability to have enough confidence in yourself and in what you think and in your opinions when there aren't many people that can see it or necessarily agree with you.

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I'm a Republican, but my mind is in a post-party age. I think that while we can have an allegiance to a political party, it should not be the dominant force in anybody's life. We are Americans before we are Republicans or Democrats.

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anybody. It's not worth it. I can have my opinion, which I'm willing to express, but I'm not going to be yelling at somebody about their differing opinion. It's not worth my energy or my effort.

What I'm most concerned about with politicians is that they seem increasingly to be concerned about pursuing power. Unfortunately, that doesn't have much to do with getting things done these days. It has to do with accumulating power, period.

Although my career has primarily been in the public sector, I've had a lot of opportunity in my lifetime to observe businesses, and I have concluded that there are many businesses that want to be involved in change, but they are stuck in the status quo. It's a lot easier that way. Organizations that are capable of change, of risk-taking, particularly of being able to push more decision-making down beneath the C-Suite, are businesses that do extremely well. Our system of capitalism is the best there is, but sometimes it's ponderously slow, and companies that can't change won't do well.

I think it's important for leaders to have people around them who will tell them the truth about their ideas. One of the reasons why I think I was successful as a governor is that I had people around me who were willing to tell me the truth. I don't mind hearing negative stuff. You need to have people around you who tell you if you're on the wrong track, because when you do lead, and if your mission is noble and correct, you will start alone, but in the end, you will have a lot of people following you.

That's not easy, because you can get criticized and you get belittled. Those things have never bothered me, to be honest with you. I don't know that I was born with it, but I was raised by a mother who was pretty fearless, and she would just speak her mind and I observed that as a young boy. I don't know if that sort of outlook is something you are born with, if it's something you inherit, or something that you've observed.

I think leadership to some degree is instinctive. You're kind of made that way. The people who follow leaders are in many respects as important as the leaders themselves, because followers have to be leaders in their own right.

Do you still consider yourself a Republican when you look at the state of the party today?

I'm a Republican, but my mind is in a post-party age. I think that while we can have an allegiance to a political party, it should not be the dominant force in anybody's life. We are Americans before we are Republicans or Democrats. I mean that sincerely. An example is my work with former Secretary of State John Kerry on the World War Zero coalition, a non-partisan movement we're part of with people from all walks of life who are committed to addressing the climate crisis. We clearly are not going to agree on everything, but it doesn't matter since we're both committed to the issue of fighting climate change.

I'm concerned about the direction of the country when it comes to the issues of poverty and affordability of healthcare and pharmaceuticals and job training. I don't really care who's going to come up with the solutions. These are issues that are critical to the future of our country.

What is going to be needed to drive real change?

With the federal government so dysfunctional, it's up to all of us as individual citizens to begin to take on many of these challenges for ourselves within our communities. Instead of waiting for Washington to work, we can bring about positive change where we live, to make things work better, in whatever ways we can. That's the basis of my most recent book, *It's Up to Us—Ten Little Ways We Can Bring About Big Change*.

Everything ultimately comes from the bottom up, my friend. There are very few leaders that lead from the top down. Most of the changes in America, whether it's women's suffrage, whether it's civil rights, or whether it was ending the Vietnam War, were all things that were driven from the bottom up.

What interested you in serving in public office?

I was never in politics for power. I was in it for change. I was in it because I thought we could do something good. I look back on 600,000 people in Ohio getting healthcare because we expanded Medicaid. That wasn't about pursuing power. That was about helping people who weren't being helped.

I feel very fortunate that I have been able to be engaged in these issues. I find great meaning in them. ●