

Leadership

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Leadership is an art not a skill

Despite it being 20 years ago, the sudden and tragic death of Princess Diana came back so vividly to so many of us on the sombre anniversary this August

At the time, the Queen struggled to find the appropriate response. She was seen to be stiff and incredibly out of touch with a nation that was in convulsive shock at the sudden and gruesome death of the ‘People’s Princess’. The outpouring of grief was a reflection of just how she had managed to touch so many who had never actually met her in person.

This was probably the moment that made the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He completely caught the mood of the nation and hardly anyone will forget his near perfect intervention, as he represented both emotionally and authentically, how the ‘common’ people felt.

It would take a few years for the Queen to recover her place in our hearts, as her scripted, wooden and emotion-free addresses damaged her reputation.

We never forget how you made us feel

In a crisis, what’s needed more than anything else, is the ability to emotionally connect with victims who feel aggrieved and neglected. It is always empathy and EQ over strategy and IQ.

Theresa May emphasised this with a bumbling and baffling performance in front of the victims of the Grenfell Fire.

Her desire to be in complete control and a desire to manage everything left her looking and feeling completely out of touch. Her guarded and cautious approach was misconstrued as uncaring and robotic.

On the other hand, Jeremy Corbyn benefited from his career of constant protesting against the establishment and his ability to whip up a like-minded audience. His visits to the scene of the fire were met with rapturous applause and cheering, as he had no high-profile security in sight, and wandered around amongst the people without ‘suited and booted’ official advisers. He was tactile and not afraid to hug or cry with his emotionally wrought soon to be ‘followers’.

Where are our true leaders today? We are not talking managers or experts who rely on process, data, strategy and intellectual prowess. There are more than enough technocrats or bureaucrats for later on—this is the time for authentic leadership.

Why was Sir Martin Moore-Bick chosen to lead what was always going to be an emotionally charged review of what actually caused the Grenfell fire, and vitally identify who was to blame?



As ever, the criteria for the chosen person had nothing to do with leadership or empathy. He was chosen because of his track record of being straight talking, hard-hitting and an honourable judge. He would take no prisoners in getting to the bottom of what actually happened. Maybe, but that is clearly not enough on its own.

Leadership is altruism

What is really needed is the ability to take all the people with them. This is less about intellect and so much more about EQ and being seen to be able to connect, empathise and most of all, ‘walk in the shoes’ of the victims.

This is leadership. Unfortunately, in these times of growing global uncertainty, we need inspired leaders more than we have ever before, but we have fallen into the bad habit of looking for the ‘cleverest person in the room’ or someone who is “strong and stable”.

Justin Trudeau and Emmanuel Macron may well be more of the models we are looking for today. They know how to emotionally connect and

unlike Theresa May and Sir Martin, they can adapt their message to meet the atmosphere prevalent in any environment they may enter—no matter how hostile.

It is true to say that David Cameron, Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and perhaps the master, Barack Obama could also reach and touch people when necessary. The leader of the Conservatives in Scotland, Ruth Davidson, has demonstrated this ability to great effect.

In a weird sort of way, Donald Trump has this capability as well and even stranger, so does Vladimir Putin. They do have a subtle difference though, much like Jeremy Corbyn, they know how to play their 'base'. They rarely look to perform in enemy territory.

This is the direct benefit of having a large, trusted and totally predictable base that they play to and perform for. As we can see from recent events, that is perhaps never enough on its own.

Over time, those they never bother trying to connect with can bring them down.

Hilary Clinton was probably the object lesson in how to throw it all away, despite an overwhelming lead, because she was a technocrat with zero EQ and an inability to empathise with large audiences, despite being able to do it well on a one-to-one basis.

Optimism is a force multiplier

If all we bring to the problem is hope, then we have made a positive difference already.

Today, leadership is no longer about rank or hierarchy, leaders can be found anywhere, to prove the point, the ideal leadership role models for today are mothers at home.

Most mothers have exceptional emotional intelligence and an empathy with all whom they support, nurture and lead. This is far different to a learned skill or 'competency', it's a way of life—the natural order of things. And vitally, it's just what is required in terms of leadership in these volatile times.

More inclusive and connected leaders are the way forward and we have a huge and largely untapped reservoir of leadership talent readily available—women.

The perennial question that is always asked about leadership; are leaders born or are leaders made? I put it to you, that the answer is neither. Leaders are not born and they are not made—they are found.

When we start looking for those who can influence and persuade without authority, we know we are on to something.

So, what should we look for?

- Those rare people who share their vulnerability, in order to embolden others.
- Those who have become comfortable being uncomfortable in open forums.
- Look beyond the job title and the status to find those who can persuade and influence others.
- The courage to say what they mean and mean what they say.
- The ability to make the complex appear simple and straightforward.
- They clearly share and understand our pain and discomfort.
- They make us feel that they are there for us—not themselves.
- When it gets messy and scary, they are always there to support and lead us.
- They know when to simply get out of the way.
- When we feel weak and disempowered, they turn up to inspire us.

Well, some may think that's quite an intimidating list of superpowers but it really isn't.

We all have these capabilities inside of us when we are in the safe environment with our loved ones. Once we get comfortable being who we really are outside of the safety and unconditional support of our loved ones, the leader inside of us starts to emerge.

This is not an applied skill to learn, it's having the courage (and support) to bring your authentic self to all you do.

Who would have thought that an African American, trained as a lawyer at Harvard, who had spent his formative years as a community organiser would emerge to become the President of the USA?

Through his ability to connect in an inclusive manner, he navigated the nation through the toughest and steepest global recession seen in generations.

Give me EQ and positive energy over IQ and pristine strategy every single time. There's only one thing worse than no leadership and that is poor leadership. What were the conditions that encouraged or forced you to take the lead and it all turned out well? My guess is that there's a huge clue in your answer to finding your very own and unique leadership code. ▲



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