



BUSINESS LEADERSHIP TODAY

This article is the third in a series that reviews five key elements of Business Leadership: Strategic, Collaborative, Inspirational, Achievement and Conscious Leadership.

PART 3 – INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In today's business environment a leader's ability to inspire has never been more essential to organisational success. Internally; staff find themselves in an ever changing workplace as their organisations continuously evolve to keep pace with their environments. There are a myriad of issues with which to deal, for example downsizing (or rightsizing as some prefer to call it), new systems being implemented, staff and management turnover increasing and competition growing. As a result, staff often find this evolving and changing workplace stressful and confronting, resulting in them ignoring change or often resisting change altogether. To further compound this, generation Y workers are even more likely to move between organisations, they expect more than a financial reward for their labours; they want to be motivated, involved and developed. If an organisation has leaders who can inspire their staff then these challenges will be overcome. Change and evolution will come from within the organisation and not just from senior leaders, staff will adopt and drive evolution, they will be motivated and strive for success. In inspired organisation's this becomes a significant competitive advantage. Ultimately money can motivate but a leader can inspire others to achieve more. As Napoleon commented he would "rather have an army of rabbits lead by a lion than an army of lions lead by a rabbit"(Bass 1990).

No organisation operates in an enclosed environment. There is an ever changing range of stakeholders who have an ever changing level of importance. Key stakeholders might include shareholders, clients, financiers, unions, alliance partners and even regulatory bodies. These external party's will only give the necessary support (which may simply mean limiting resistance) when they have strong communications with an organisation's leadership, when they derive confidence from the organisation's leadership and when they are influenced by the logic and rationale put forward by the organisation's leadership. In summary they need to be inspired by the organisations leadership to support the direction of the organisation.

When people think of inspirational leaders in history, they often think of the great orators, for example Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. Without doubt these leaders have all inspired their followers to go above and beyond, regardless the circumstances. However, inspirational leadership is not just about being a great orator, the greatest of orators who does not hold the trust of their audience is more likely to antagonise than inspire them. Therefore the first and most critical



element of inspirational leadership is the ability to build a sense of trust and confidence. The starting point for any leader is to trust and have confidence in themselves; as the former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke commented in an interview “if you haven’t got confidence in yourself how in the hell can you expect other people to have confidence in you.” This is particularly the case in times of rapid upheaval and change, no one wants to follow a leader who’s speech is full of words like maybe, perhaps, should we and hopefully. They want to follow confident leaders who lay out a clear direction. Leaders also build a sense of trust by being authentic in their relationships with all parties, i.e. from the new receptionist to the chairman of the board. Trusted leaders have a high level of transparency, i.e. there are no hidden agendas; they follow through on their commitments at all levels, they talk openly, even if the news is not good. People trust leader’s who are consistent in their demonstration of values. Leaders who build confidence in others also recognise and celebrate success appropriately, whether it is holding an all staff party or an individual acknowledgement of a job well done.

A large part of a leader’s capacity to inspire is driven by their ability to influence. Lasting influence is not gained by authority, force of personality or coercion. These forms of influence are likened to holding a gun to someone’s head, as soon as you put the gun down your influence has evaporated and you have created an adversary rather than an ally. Real influence is about intellectually persuading others through the provision of sound and mutually beneficial logic. In doing this, those being influenced make up their own mind to agree rather than reluctantly agreeing. This sort of influence goes beyond the immediate situation, long term alliances and relationship can be formed and all parties can win, not just now but in the future as well.

The third element of inspirational leadership is a leader’s ability to communicate. At a base level a leader must be able to get their message across in a clear, concise and well structured manner ensuring their message is easily understood. At a higher level of communication, leaders need to make their message easier and more interesting for their intended audience, i.e. their audience want to and enjoy listening to or reading the message. This can be done by tailoring the communication to their specific needs or interests, by using relevant examples and by using appropriate analogies to highlight key points. In some situations effective story telling can also be a very effective way of conveying a message to others. Using the appropriate medium in the appropriate situation is also an important part of communication. Email is a highly effective form of communication, particularly when communicating basic information to a large number of people. However, all too often in today’s fast paced environment email’s are sent instead of phone calls being made or meetings arranged. Emails do not allow relationships to be built, questions to be asked or ambiguities to be explored.

Organisations that are lead by people who build a sense of confidence, persuade others as to the merits of their ideas and communicate these ideas effectively will



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have an inspired workforce and supportive external stakeholders. This is an organisation that can consistently evolve effectively and efficiently with the needs of its environment. This will result in sustainable success.

By

Simon Tedstone

Director



LEADING CHANGE

Leadership and Human Capital Consulting

Mobile +61 438 552 422

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/simontedstone>

www.leadingchange.net.au

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