



LEADERSHIP ACUMEN Issue 5

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Why Is Leadership So Important to Develop Anyway?

If ever there was a year that exposed the need for leadership development, 2002 was one in particular, so was 2009! We have seen many of our traditional role models exposed for simple ‘What’s In It For Me’ (WIIFM) practices and attitudes. The community has spoken - good leadership requires more.

Role Models Are Changing

Our past role model/hero images built around conquest, power, growth achievement, accumulation of stuff, elite perspective – the dedicated and committed warrior – are now starting to be openly questioned. In a world which has become more populated and closely connected, this kind of behaviour is unsustainable and perhaps even destabilizing.

Leadership heroes of the future are likely to show attributes such as: sustained achievement, balancing of power and stewardship for enhanced common benefit, adaptability and ability to let go of status quo, facilitation of interconnectedness and consensus. Courage in the future context will be courage of conviction and ethics, courage to engage with complexity and paradox, and courage to successfully bring together those of different cultural backgrounds.

The incoming generation of senior leaders – in business, government and the 3rd sector – have had very mixed levels of preparation for leadership. Many have had relatively narrow and/or technically based career tracks. As a result they have not necessarily developed the broad perspective, strategic, and HR/team skills. Others have fast-tracked up the outgoing system of the previous generation.

Over the past 10+ years, the outgoing cadre of senior leaders seemed to lose the time honoured art of mentoring. Organizations downplayed the value of apprenticeship and the taking-on of young acolytes, while many of the cornerstone values of our society and organizations were assumed rather than explicitly discussed.

So today, and over the next very few years, it is going to be important to nurture, support, guide, encourage, and foster new leadership understanding at a significant pace.

The New Generation of Leaders Require both New and Old Attributes

As noted before, true leadership is not the same as an ability to “command” towards narrow success.

These are challenging times in society –

- The interests of *individualism* have surpassed the understanding of the need for a healthy community in balance.
- The power and financial resources of the elite are largely caught-up in sustaining the status quo of consumption, waste generating, and polarizing practices.
- Revolutionizing, or perhaps better put – “Renaissance – promoters/leaders” are often not accepted, perhaps actively marginalized, and sometimes ‘stomped out’ by those for whom the status quo is a benefit.

New, adaptive leaders must risk these elements and give voice to new approaches at the fringe. And, they must facilitate the meaningful conversations required to advance beyond the status quo.

Today's leaders are also called upon to deal with paradox. We look to our future leaders to:

- be both decisive and yet also facilitative,
- deliver local results, and see the big picture
- maximize efficiency and maximize productivity
- enhance progressive profitability and distinguish through added customer value
- work effectively with Board and Community, and be a visionary, charismatic, exemplary initiative-taker,
- amass great knowledge and develop broad perspective, but learn this through short bursts and e-learning approaches that last less than a day.

Let's get real you might say. Community, media, and non-leaders must be more reasonable. Unfortunately, this schizophrenic set of expectations isn't likely to go away any time soon. Why? Because they are actually the set of skills required from leaders operating in a complex network of systems and sub-systems.

This is why new network-leadership capacities need to be nurtured, and why the outgoing generation of leaders need to commit to longer-term pattern-base expansion and development for the acolytes coming along behind.

2002/2009 – Lessons in what NOT to do

2002 exposed many examples of greed, cultural intolerance, arrogance, double standards, plus self-interest above the interest of the community being served and led. As a result, Leaders and Leadership has fallen from grace. We have broken trusts. Corporate executives, religious clerics, politicians and senior bureaucrats, charitable organization heads, have all been in the news reminding us that the enemy of good leadership is power and greed. One has to wonder why after 2002, we didn't learn anything, and managed to repeat our mistakes on an even grader scale in 2009?

2010 and beyond will serve-up significant challenges, including:

- greenhouse gas emission reduction and waste reduction amid an insane and superficial global credit exchange system
- stabilization of safety and security amid terrorism and intolerance
- return to profitability of businesses within a "replacement" market reality
- separation of religious leadership from state leadership in some countries
- enhancement of democracy, jurisprudence and transparency practices
- reduction of poverty and disadvantage
- inspiration of new innovations and focused improvement of productivity
- enhanced respect for diversity and engagement of all our human potential
- practical, local solutions respecting more complex regional and global environmental pressures

Who will lead us through these challenges? Lord Baden Powell lived in somewhat simpler times, but his adage for leadership is no less relevant today: "Be Prepared!"

What it takes to "be prepared" today however; is a little more complex and demanding than a couple of decades ago. Still, we need leaders that can embrace these new competencies. We need existing systems and leaders to nurture these abilities as their final act in "passing on the torch" of responsibility. And, we need to encourage people to step forward to engage themselves in a new era of leadership demands.

This is why it is so important to invest in leadership development today!

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