

Getting to know you

An effective leadership style demands strong self-awareness and authenticity, believe Stillpoint Partners Ann Stevenson and Lynn Hull...

It doesn't take a genius to realise that leadership (in the widest context) is not working in the UK. What is the missing ingredient, and why have we consistently failed to get it right?

UK plc needs leaders who have raised their consciousness, are capable of dropping vested interests and are aware of their impact. Only then will they be able to lead their staff from a place of embodied authenticity, ready to encourage and recognise the latent talent and untapped creative resource that lies in their people.

Leaders in both the political and business worlds fail in large numbers to provide this kind of inspirational leadership, despite having access to some of the finest establishments for leadership training. Nor can blame for the missing ingredient be placed at the door of information or structures. Management information has grown exponentially over the last few years; business process re-engineering is virtually universal; and there is a fascination for evidence and measuring. We spend an awful lot of time weighing the pig instead of fattening it.

Despite all this knowledge, education and training, there seems to be confusion and a lack of consensus about what a leader should be. Some leadership training focuses on copying and learning from perceived great leaders, and misses the very nature of what it is to be a natural leader, let alone a great one. This often leads to continued insistence on command and control, invisibility at the top and ineptitude in people management.

Staff engagement research repeatedly demonstrates that it is the day-to-day interactions based on trust with our boss that are crucial for engagement. In addition, top executives are seen as responsible for creating and communicating their passion and vision, while the ability to integrate a coaching approach is the must-have for any business leader.

It is therefore time to dispel the myth that soft skills are 'pink and fluffy' and are to be avoided. Self-awareness and the skills to understand others to draw out their latent talent have never been given the focus and priority they

warrant. The current economic difficulties have brought us to a turning point, a chance to do things differently.

Studies on engagement and leadership science point to the essential nature of this inside-out approach. When leaders focus time and energy on understanding what drives them, their values, their vision, and what holds them back, they can then own the true essence of leadership – vulnerability. This insight supports leaders in meeting the demands of leading at a time when the only certainty is the magnitude of what they don't know.

Authentic leadership means conscious action that allows each and every leader to find their natural style and way of being. Relationships built like this are founded on trust. People become more resilient, independent, and willing to go the extra mile. Powerful conversations in real time cut through inefficiencies and achieve greater performance.

Society is now crying out for our business and political leaders to tap into their instinct and lead authentically with their heart to inspire insight, creativity and innovation. In short, it places people at the top of the agenda.

By unleashing people's raw mental, physical and spiritual horsepower – whether within organisations or out in our communities – real transformation happens. Leaders can only effectively apply the knowledge gained from the great halls of learning when they bring their own raw horsepower into the equation.

Authentic leadership is a vital keystone to creating organisational success through an engaged workforce. That elusive missing ingredient is the willingness on the part of leaders to 'know thyself to get over thyself'. Change has to start at the top.



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