

THE ‘BEING’ OF LEADERSHIP

Some leadership traits are easier to develop than others. While many L&D vendors concentrate solely on the doing of leadership, others concentrate on the self awareness, personal values and mental toughness required to be a leader

The average reign of the CEO in medium to large Australian organisations is getting shorter each year. Many have either not been at the helm during previous economic downturns or have not been successful in effectively energising their talent to play their part in turning the corner and leading the way as competition for limited economic demand intensifies.

It is a damning summation – and certainly a generalisation – but the good news is that the situation in many organisations can be turned around. “Leadership agility is the key,” says Adam Kreuzer, manager of human capital and strategic change at BearingPoint. “It is those leaders who remain true to the cause, with the support of their shareholders and board of management, who are able to take a longer term view, outplay the doom and gloom and deliver on their growth strategies.”

Not surprisingly, Kreuzer believes that some leaders are coping better than others, depending on their leadership skills, resilience, experiences and attributes. Many leaders have been caught by surprise in terms of the intensity and speed of the

economic downturn and it is not always the leaders who have decades of experience who are most effective in troubled economic times. “Some of our veteran senior executives have been jaded by the Gordon Gekko-like excesses of the 1980s and are under increasing pressure to pull a ‘rabbit out of a hat’ to fix the terrible performance of their industry or target markets,” he says.

What is required?

The skills required in a contracting economic environment are certainly different to those required in boom times, even through the central core of what is required – the critical competency DNA – will remain the same. This central core relates to the very essence of human endeavour – leadership strength, depth and motivation. The focus for the leader may also need to shift; time frames may shrink and goals will need to be adjusted.

“None of this is rocket science,” says Kreuzer. “However, what will differentiate leaders at all levels of an organisation in the current economic climate are those who can build the motivation to demonstrate leadership agility, creativity and innovation to



What's their spike?

Match the famous person with their spike (answers at end of article)

Sir Richard Branson	Oprah Winfrey	Nelson Mandela	Margaret Thatcher	Albert Einstein	Cathy Freeman	Madonna	Ghandi
(a) An ability to see the humanity in every person, empathising with all sectors of society – even those in complete opposition to him	(b) Spotting market opportunities and having the deep-seated belief to make them happen	(c) Ability to see beyond current market trends, and use continual personal re-invention to shape the industry	(d) Uses their own resource of courage and drive to change the world, to help others to contribute and fight challenges in society	(e) The ability to convert her convictions into actions, choose her battles and the courage to be unpopular	(f) The courage to battle the odds coupled with resilience, tenacity and dedication to pursue a dream	(g) Inspires a sense of self-respect and self-confidence to empower individual decision-making and cultivate social awareness	(h) Asking questions no one thought to ask to invent theories that no one ever dreamed of

Source: YSC

support the inward pressure they will be feeling to batten down the hatches and reduce all elements of risk in their decisions, behaviours and outcomes.”

HR professionals should be looking to unleash the leadership potential lying within their ranks, and to develop those skills to optimum levels. It's easier said than done – the range of leadership development options is daunting. *Human Capital* provides a few tips.

How to develop it

Leadership development specialists LIW3 take an organisational approach to leadership, which means looking at leaders at every level of the organisation and equipping them with the same skills – it is merely the level of complexity that changes depending on where the participant sits.

“For many years the market said the executive team must perform differently to supervisors and mid-level managers. To a certain extent that is true, but in our view less is more, so if we

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– Rob Metcalfe

have a common language for leadership at every level, that is a good thing. We're seeing an appetite for common decision making processes and common planning processes, particularly where those processes take account of a rapidly changing situation. We're seeing an appetite for setting relationships up for success as well as for coaching people during the relationship,” says Rob Metcalfe, managing director of LIW3.

Given the current economy it is hardly surprising that organisations are looking at different ways of developing their people. Rather than learning events like all-day training sessions, development activities are being embedded in the real world. Metcalfe cites a major property construction development organisation as an example: “They want to work in small groups with a dedicated leadership coach on particular infrastructure projects. We'll embed toolkits for leadership within the team using the real projects as the case study,” he explains.

Alongside action learning is the ongoing development of blended learning solutions. Metcalfe believes face-to-face interaction will never be phased out – indeed, it will be brought together with learning through projects, mentoring, and e-learning. “It's an opportunity for us as leadership development professionals to capitalise on that need in the market – to deliver things differently, more cheaply, with the use of technology,” Metcalfe says.

Ultimately the goal is to develop ‘internal champions’ who are trained to deliver learning opportunities inhouse. “We'll work with clients so they can start to develop these skills in their own people,” says Metcalfe.

Getting down to fundamentals

The three fundamental questions of leadership – and also the key behind LIW3’s name and service offerings – are the following: Where are you going? Where are you now? What are you going to do next?

“It’s the common framework for leadership. The development piece is really a way to close the gap,” says Metcalfe.

Metcalfe believes development can be further broken down to two elements: the ‘doing’ of leadership including decision making, planning, briefing, coaching, developing relationships; and the ‘being’ of leadership. “The being of leadership is around self awareness, personal values, mental toughness. We encourage leaders to reflect upon those and reap the benefits of doing so,” he says.

There is a fundamental piece of inner strength that leaders gain from thinking about who they are – people can be good leaders if they haven’t done that thinking, but Metcalfe believes they would be far more effective if they have come to a sense of peace with themselves. “If you’ve done some reflection on who you are, where you’re heading, what you value, what are your beliefs are, and what triggers your emotions you’re also likely to be giving your undivided attention to the people you are leading,” he says.

Developing self-awareness

That inner strength can be tough to get a handle on. While psychological and personality profiling has been a mainstay of

executive development for many years, one company has taken this to the next level. YSC offers in-depth profiling sessions with senior leaders with the objective of identifying that leader’s ‘spike’. The spike notion maintains that people who are successful have built their success on a unique combination of strengths. As an example, a brilliant deal maker is someone who can see opportunities where others can’t. They have interpersonal skills that help them to influence others, and they probably have a high level of drive. A combination of elements will come together to mean their spike is to make deals that other people would struggle to identify or close.

Through a deep biographical one-on-one interview with the participant, as well as some psychometric exercises, the YSC team produces a report for the individual and the organisation, followed by a feedback session for the individual. Coaching and further development opportunities may follow.

“Essentially we identify someone’s spike through a process that takes the participant through the journey of their life, from school, through to university and onto career and life outside of work.

Leadership dashboard

How can a leader create the conditions for success in tough times? Rob Metcalfe of LIW3 recommends a basic model to assess business complexity.



“Most people live in a complex world and it’s going to get more complicated. We believe that to navigate our way through that world the leader creates three conditions for themselves and those around them. These three conditions are around clarity, climate and competence.”

- » Clarity: do we know where we’re going and why we’re going there, and have we translated that into objective goals for the whole organisation?
- » Climate: the systems, resources, culture – all the things we need to be successful
- » Competencies: the skills and the knowledge, but also the behaviour and attitude required to be successful.



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By identifying your spike you're also identifying where you might have a blind spot – Carmel Pelunsky

Through exploring how this person reacted and felt through each of those contexts and environments what is assembled is their recipe for success. We learn how this has served them well, what they may need to do differently, and how they might need to use it differently going forward,” explains Carmel Pelunsky, director of YSC.

There are a range of scenarios where this knowledge can be invaluable. It may be that the participant is on the brink of a promotion into a more senior role so they need to think about how they can use their spike differently; it might be that if they expand their spike they would have more impact in the organisation; or it might be because in a recessionary period they need to use their spike differently from a growth period.

“People have multiple strengths but if you get to the right spike it's really one distinctive thing that stands out about that person,” says Pelunsky.

For every mountain peak or spike there is also a valley, and the YSC process also allows leaders identify their weaknesses, or “blind spots” as Pelunsky refers to them. “Once you've identified the spike we then look at what some of the associated blind spots might be. For example, if you are incredibly visionary and forward thinking and creative you're unlikely to be looking at how the organisation is running currently and making sure all the operational things are looked after and ensuring people are doing what they are meant to be doing. By identifying your spike you're also identifying where you might have a blind spot,” Pelunsky says.

Another example would be someone who is incredibly good at engaging people and bringing people along with them but they might spend less time looking at the data and analysing whether they are heading in the right direction. They may end up taking everyone with them, but taking them to the wrong place.

Pelunsky firmly believes that a leader will be more effective if they can not only leverage their spike but also create an executive team to compensate for blind spots. If everyone in the team is playing to their spikes, Pelunsky says there are two benefits:

- » you reduce your level of unhealthy competitiveness because you recognise what each person is contributing and each team member feels valued for what they are bringing that is distinctive
- » you realise what you need to bring into that team when you recruit

“You don't want to replicate what people already have in your team and the temptation is always to hire people who are like

yourself. This helps to remove that temptation. The notion of the spike is identifying your own and then helping people play to their own,” she says.

It can be a challenging process. “It's a deep and profound process and it does require a certain amount of courage to explore yourself at that level,” says Pelunsky. “For example, one person's strength may contain an element of intense drive. That person may need to really own up to the level of competitiveness they have with peers and learn how to turn that competitiveness into real strengths rather than alienating those around them.”

Pelunsky believes that psychometric testing is only useful when it has perceptive discussions around it. She also believes people like to be the authors of their own stories, so even while undertaking a profiling session the YSC team value the way the individual tells their own story. “We believe we can gain a lot about how they see the world, what their drivers are, how they engage with people and what their emotions are by the way they tell their story. The feedback we receive about our process is that participants feel very dignified and feel their narrative has been taken into account, and they haven't been put into a box. We're able to create a narrative that they feel they have co-created and yet also challenges them and highlights areas they need to be stronger in,” she says.

The more things change...

As a final tip on this journey towards leadership self-awareness, Metcalfe urges leaders to concentrate not on what has changed around them but rather what remains the same. “Organisations that care about their purpose, that care about their values, will have a solid platform against which they can make good decisions. We encourage people to say, ‘what is the platform, what is the permanence from which everything else can be managed to provide stability not only for my people but for myself?’

“Probably the most intensely personal tip I would give is this: do not underestimate the power of having a business plan just for you that goes beyond the results of the 360 that really explores what motivates you and why, and what you will do about it, in all areas of your life. How can you get a stable rudder for your own leadership practice that enables you to be at peace with the world and the people you deal with, no matter whether we're in recession or not?,” he concludes. **HC**

Answers

Sir Richard Branson (b); Oprah Winfrey (g); Nelson Mandela (d); Margaret Thatcher (e); Albert Einstein (h); Cathy Freeman (f); Madonna (c); Ghandi (a)