

The Power of Safety Leadership: Paul O'Neill, Safety and Alcoa

Posted by Aerossurance on Dec 29, 2014 in Business Aviation, Fixed Wing, Helicopters, Human Factors / Performance, Military / Defence, Mining / Resource Sector, Offshore, Oil & Gas / IOGP / Energy, Safety Culture, Safety Management | 0 comments

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The Power of Safety Leadership: Paul O'Neill, Safety and Alcoa

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In his book [The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, and How to Change](#), Charles Duhigg, described the reaction to Paul O'Neill's first presentation as the new CEO of the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) in 1987:

A few minutes before noon, the new chief executive, Paul O'Neill, took the stage. He looked dignified, solid, confident. Like a chief executive. Then he opened his mouth.

After his presentation:

The investors in the room almost stampeded out the doors when the presentation ended. One jogged to the lobby, found a pay phone, and called his 20 largest clients. "I said, **The board put a crazy hippie in charge and he's going to kill the company**," that investor told me. **"I ordered them to sell their stock immediately**, before everyone else in the room started calling their clients and telling them the same thing.

However, that investor admitted that in the long run he recognised that:

"It was literally the worst piece of advice I gave in my entire career."

Why the stampede? What did O'Neill say?:

"I want to talk to you about worker safety," he said. "Every year, numerous Alcoa workers are injured so badly that they miss a day of work. I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries." The audience was confused...O'Neill hadn't said anything about profits. He didn't mention any business buzzwords. Eventually, someone raised a hand and asked about inventories in the aerospace division. Another asked about the company's capital ratios. "I'm not certain you heard me," O'Neill said. "If

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you want to understand how Alcoa is doing, you need to look at our workplace safety figures." Profits, he said, didn't matter as much as safety.



Alcoa Australia Aluminium Plant (Credit: Dima Beliaikov)

Safety Leadership, Safety Vision

O'Neill had a clear vision and wanted to focus on safety to develop continuous improvement across the company:

*"I knew I had to transform Alcoa," O'Neill told me. "But you can't order people to change."
"That's not how the brain works. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing.
If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company."*

O'Neill stated that when hazards are identified he wanted them fixed, he didn't want safety to be 'budgeted'.

Safety Leadership Challenged

Six months into his tenure a new employee died:

...a piece of machinery had stopped operating and one of the workers — a young man who had joined the company a few weeks earlier... — had tried a repair. He had jumped over a yellow safety wall surrounding the press and walked across the pit. There was a piece of aluminum jammed into the hinge on a swinging six-foot arm. The young man pulled on the aluminum scrap, removing it. The machine was fixed. Behind him, the arm restarted its arc, swinging toward his head. When it hit, the arm crushed his skull. He was killed instantly.

Fourteen hours later, O'Neill ordered all the plant's executives into an emergency meeting. For much of the day, they painstakingly re-created the accident with diagrams and by watching videotapes again and again. They identified dozens of errors that had contributed to the death, including two managers who had seen the man jump over the barrier but failed to stop him, a training program that hadn't emphasized to the man that he wouldn't be blamed for a breakdown, lack of instructions that he should find a manager before attempting a repair, and the absence of sensors to automatically shut down the machine when someone stepped into the pit.

"We killed this man," a grim-faced O'Neill told the group. "It's my failure of leadership. I caused his death. And it's the failure of all of you in the chain of command." The executives

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in the room were taken aback.

Sure, a tragic accident had occurred, but tragic accidents were part of life at Alcoa. Within a week of that meeting, however, all the safety railings at Alcoa's plants were repainted bright yellow, and new policies were written up. Employees were told not to be afraid to suggest proactive maintenance. And O'Neill sent a note to every worker telling them call him at home if managers didn't follow up on their safety suggestions.

The Essence of Safety Leadership

And what happened? That focus on seeking suggestions and acting on them helped give permission not only for safety improvements but a whole range of continuous improvements (observation, identification, analysis and action) across all aspects of their operations:

"Workers started calling, but they didn't want to talk about accidents," O'Neill told me. "They wanted to talk about all these other great ideas." Within a year of O'Neill's speech, Alcoa's profits would hit a record high. By the time O'Neill retired in 2000 to become Treasury Secretary, the company's annual net income was five times larger than before he arrived, and its market capitalization had risen by \$27 billion. Someone who invested a million dollars in Alcoa on the day O'Neill was hired would have earned another million dollars in dividends while he headed the company, and the value of their stock would be five times bigger when he left. What's more, all that growth occurred while Alcoa became one of the safest companies in the world.

However, fundamentally O'Neill argued that investors should treat safety as a key indicator of the effectiveness of a management team and that:

Organisations with potential for greatness have the characteristic of being places where people don't get hurt.

This presentation covers the points that Duhigg discusses:

Paul O'Neill on Safety Leadership

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Alcoa is not the only company to have made a leadership driven safety transformation: [The CEO of Anglo American on Getting Serious About Safety](#)

Safety Leadership - the Key to Safety Culture

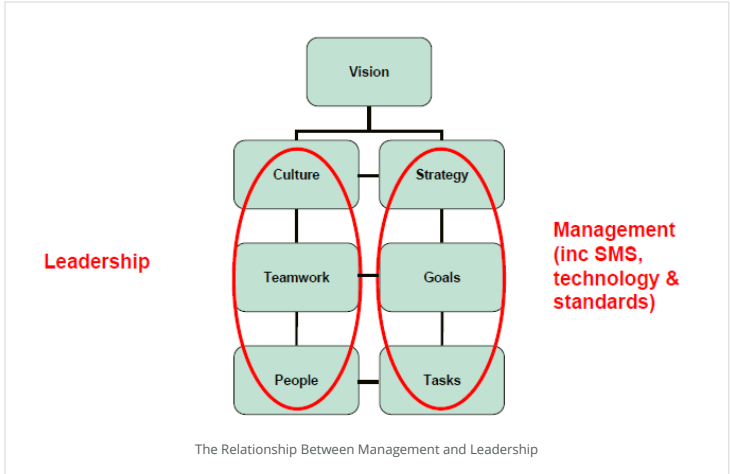
Leadership is a powerful influence on culture.

The term 'leadership' is sometimes misused. Sometimes as a trendy alternative for 'senior management' and occasionally in the Orwellian term 'thought leadership' (which was recently labelled "grossly indulgent" in the Forbes list of 'most annoying business slang').

Leadership is not the same as managing resources and schedules. Here we use leadership to represent an activity that involves:

- Being visible,
- Focusing on people,
- Building trust and ultimately...
- [Influencing other people's behaviour](#)

It is this deliberate, concerted and continual activity that can influence culture, though [as we have showed previously](#), that can be unravelled far more rapidly by poor leadership.



Excellent safety leaders realise that safety leadership is not an alternative to safety management but an essential complement. They also have a vision for safety in their organisation. It perhaps goes without saying that safety leaders therefore have a passion for safety.

Further Reading on Safety Leadership

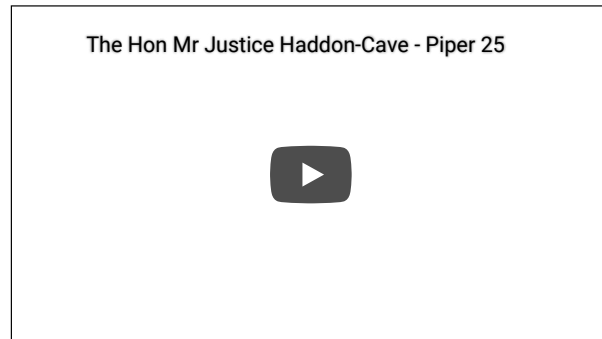
Tom Peters has said: "Leaders don't create more followers, they create more leaders." We highly recommend this case study: '[Beyond SMS](#)' by Andy Evans (our founder) & John Parker, Flight Safety Foundation, AeroSafety World, May 2008 You may also be interested in these Aerossurance articles:

- [How To Develop Your Organisation's Safety Culture](#) positive advice on the value of safety leadership and an aviation example of safety leadership development.
- [How To Destroy Your Organisation's Safety Culture](#) a cautionary tale of how poor leadership and communications can undermine safety.

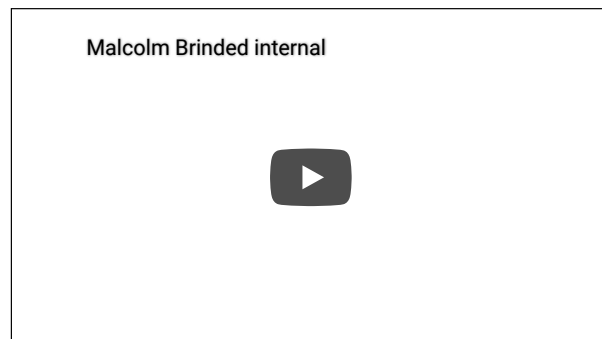
The International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP) has also published the report: [Shaping safety culture through safety leadership](#).

The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has published: [Leading for Safety](#)

In June 2013, The Hon. Mr Justice Haddon-Cave addressed delegates at Piper 25 (a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of [Piper Alpha](#) offshore disaster in the North Sea, in which 167 workers died). His paper was entitled "Leadership and Culture, Principles and Professionalism, Simplicity and Safety – Lessons from the [Nimrod Review](#)", a report issued in [October 2009](#), following the loss of Royal Air Force (RAF) [Nimrod XV230](#):



Piper 25: [Presentation Transcript](#) Also see this piece on lessons from the formation of the UK Military Aviation Authority (MAA): [Regulatory Reflections & Resisting the Seduction of the Risk Management Process](#) Malcolm Brinded also discusses leadership and how good safety performance and good business performance go hand in hand:



UPDATE 31 January 2015: A [McKinsey study](#) of 189,000 business people has concluded that 4 leadership behaviours collectively account for 89% of leadership effectiveness:

Top kinds of leadership behavior¹

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Be supportive | 11 Keep group organized and on task |
| 2 Champion desired change | 12 Make quality decisions |
| 3 Clarify objectives, rewards, and consequences | 13 Motivate and bring out best in others |
| 4 Communicate prolifically and enthusiastically | 14 Offer a critical perspective |
| 5 Develop others | 15 Operate with strong results orientation |
| 6 Develop and share a collective mission | 16 Recover positively from failures |
| 7 Differentiate among followers | 17 Remain composed and confident in uncertainty |
| 8 Facilitate group collaboration | 18 Role model organizational values |
| 9 Foster mutual respect | 19 Seek different perspectives |
| 10 Give praise | 20 Solve problems effectively |

¹Based on a survey of 81 organizations that are diverse in geography (eg, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America), industry (eg, agriculture, consulting, energy, government, insurance, mining, and real estate), and size (from ~7,500 to 300,000 employees).

Source: McKinsey's Organizational Health Index

UPDATE 30 April 2015: Another McKinsey survey finds that :

...executives who move effectively into the C-suite are communicating priorities, valuing their teams, spending time on culture, and understanding their unique leadership role. Indeed, executives reporting the most successful transitions stand out from the rest in how they built buy-in and communicated a vision to their teams and their organizations. While they wanted more time to build their teams, the executives who transitioned successfully are more likely than others to say they devoted the right amount of time to understanding the organizational culture.

UPDATE 1 July 2015: Rethinking Leadership "Businesses need a new approach to the practice of leadership — and to leadership development"

We can gain insights into a new model of leadership from the late Nelson Mandela... Mandela frequently emphasized the shared nature of leadership and was known for giving credit to others. For example, when honored for his role in ending apartheid, he would note that abolishing apartheid was a collective endeavor. Perhaps one of the most important leadership lessons we might distill from Mandela was not his acquisition of leadership but the way he shared it. Mandela's approach suggests a new way of thinking about leadership — not as a set of traits possessed by particularly gifted individuals, but as a set of practices among those engaged together in realizing their choices. This kind of leadership involves activities such as scanning the environment, mobilizing resources and inviting participation, weaving interactions across existing and new networks and offering feedback and facilitating reflection.

UPDATE 6 November 2015: Prof Edgar Shein gave a presentation: So You Want to Create a Culture? which emphasised understanding the change you want to achieve.

UPDATE 11 January 2016: You may like this Forbes article [Do You Know What's Really Driving](#)

[Your Organizational Culture?](#) This make 4 key points:

1. Culture is a collective concept.
2. You may need some outside perspective to get an unbiased view.
3. Don't jump to conclusions. What you see isn't always what you get and may result addressing symptoms rather what is creating them.
4. Understand the why behind the what.

UPDATE 26 April 2016: We look at the origins of the safety culture concept: [Chernobyl: 30](#)

[Years On – Lessons in Safety Culture](#). We also look at the [International Atomic Energy](#)

[Agency](#) (IAEA) framework for 'strong' safety culture consisting of five characteristics:



Each of these five characteristics have a series of subsidiary attributes.

UPDATE 5 May 2016: The UK Confidential Incident Reporting and Analysis System ([CIRAS](#)) has

released the [presentations from their 'Safety Culture Under Strain' conferences](#) held in

London and Edinburgh in April 2016. Aerossurance attended the excellent Edinburgh event.

Also, the UK Rail Accident Investigation Branch ([RAIB](#)) [commented](#) in a new investigation

report:

The relationship between safety culture and the safety management system is one of interdependency ie while a strong safety culture will reinforce a safety management system, the lack of a well-developed safety management system in an organisation is likely to inhibit the growth of a strong safety culture.

UPDATE 1 August 2016: We also recommend this article: [Leicester's lesson in leadership](#),

published in *The Psychologist*.

UPDATE: 28 August 2016: We look at an [EU](#) research project that recently investigated the

concepts of *organisational safety intelligence* (the safety information available) and *executive*

safety wisdom (in using that to make safety decisions) by interviewing 16 senior industry

executives: [Safety Intelligence & Safety Wisdom](#). They defined these as:

Safety Intelligence *the various sources of quantitative information an organisation may use to identify and assess various threats.*

Safety Wisdom *the judgement and decision-making of those in senior positions who must decide what to do to remain safe, and how they also use quantitative and qualitative information to support those decisions.*

UPDATE 14 September 2016: An [article on leadership learning and development in the](#)

[Harvard Business Review](#) that describes what they call the 'Great Training Robbery',

commented that:

...we've learned that education and training gain the most traction within highly visible organizational change and development efforts championed by senior leaders. That's because such efforts motivate people to learn and change; create the conditions for them to apply what they've studied; foster immediate improvements in individual and organizational effectiveness; and put in place systems that help sustain the learning.

In another article, [How to Combat the Leadership Crisis](#), it is noted that:

...leadership development programs need to fit the culture, style and goals for both the organization and the leaders receiving the training. Too often, they simply don't. Customization is minimal — putting the company name on the program or perhaps adding an industry-specific case study. To truly fit the organization, leadership development programs must be linked to three organizational facets: initiatives, key goals and strategy and culture.

UPDATE 19 September 2016: It's worth listening to [Todd Conklin's podcast interview with Prof Ed Schein](#).

UPDATE 22 September 2016: NTSB Board Member [Robert L. Sumwalt](#) presented [Lessons from the Ashes: The Critical Role of Safety Leadership](#) to an audience in Houston, TX. Its worth noting the emphasis made of safety as a 'value' and of alignment across an organisation.

UPDATE 26 September 2016: John Bersin writes: [Data Proves that Culture, Values, and Career are Biggest Drivers of Employment Brand](#). When it comes to recommending your organisation to others:

An employee's rating of "culture and values" is 4.9 times more predictive of a company recommendation than salary and benefits. The second most important factor is "career opportunities," which is 4.5 more important than salary and benefits. The third factor is "confidence in senior leadership," which is approximately 4 times more predictive than salary and benefits.

UPDATE 30 September 2016: [Talking leadership: Julia Fernando on understanding culture to enable compassionate care in the NHS](#).

The difficulty is that once a culture is set and norms are established, it can be hard to change the status quo. Changing a culture of fear and blame can therefore be difficult. Leadership plays a vital role in driving forward such changes...

UPDATE 31 October 2016: In an article, [How to establish a culture of growth and development](#) it is noted that:

When it comes to staff development, direct managers have the largest role to play in providing employees with an opportunity to apply and grow their skills and abilities. Yet, 64

per cent of L&D leaders identified the fact that 'managers don't encourage, enable or follow up' as an obstacle for learning. Managers must facilitate employee development by enabling employees to put into practice what they learn through stretch assignments, team collaboration, and offering regular coaching and feedback on their performance.

UPDATE 8 December 2016: [Aerossurance founder, Andy Evans](#), presented on the topic of safety leadership at a [UK CAA helicopter safety culture seminar](#) today.

UPDATE 24 December 2016: [Getting beyond the BS of leadership literature](#):

The focus on leadership should be about useful behavior rather than overly simplistic, and therefore fundamentally inaccurate, categorizations of people and personalities.

UPDATE 5 January 2017: [Poor communication sends oil worker morale plummeting, chaplain says](#). [Oil and Gas Chaplin](#) Rev Gordon Craig commented on the "tremendous human impact" of large-scale job losses amongst workers in the oil and gas industry:

People are very resilient. But one of the hardest things to deal with is uncertainty, not knowing what is going to happen to them and their families. This causes stress and they all feel that stress. I have seen excellent examples of companies engaging with their people and doing everything to give them as much information as they possibly can. Their people feel valued and it helps build trust. But I have seen examples where that doesn't happen. Employees then tend to feel they are just numbers on the sheet and not a person.

In an interview with [Energy Voice](#) Craig said managers were not heartless and every company he encountered did care about their staff.

What's actually happening is that their communication is not done effectively. Of course, a lot of HR departments have been cut back as well. Sometimes people offshore don't see these issues.

UPDATE 26 January 2017: In a discussion on another case of safety leadership (and collaboration with a union leader to improve safety) see: ['Deepwater Horizon' film reminds former Alabama Power CEO of lessons learned in tragedy](#) The CEO and union leader...

...made a commitment to one another: we might disagree about many other things in the future, but we would never again disagree about safety. This was the first step in a long process towards mutual trust and respect. It took several years, but step by step we built a process and changed our "us versus them" culture.

UPDATE 29 January 2017: [Leadership for a just & interdependent culture](#)

Overall, leaders must be the creators of communities of practice. Leadership is the start, the finish and the continuum to evolve its culture into a just and interdependent culture, and

maintain it.

UPDATE 30 January 2017: In [Getting the Leadership Basics Right](#) its us said their are five fundamental principles of leadership:

- Hire people who can find meaning through your business.
- Provide clear, compelling goals.
- Give people a path for growth and impact.
- Foster a positive, supportive culture.
- Lead with a higher purpose.

UPDATE 16 February 2017: See also our article [Consultants & Culture: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#)

UPDATE 21 February 2017: The value of followership should not be under-estimated: [You lead, I'll follow](#)

UPDATE 25 February 2017: [Leadership by Loitering](#):

Without investing the time at the front end nothing of value will stick. Sure, we may get someone to do what they're told and achieve excellent short term outcomes, but that's more a management activity than a leadership one. Looking, listening, learning, connecting, being genuinely curious and non-judgemental in this person, right here, right now. And hence slowly and gently building trust, candour and openness. Cultural anthropologists spend years living in villages to deeply understand what's really going on. I'm not saying it takes that long of course, but you'll know when it's working, when you're in the zone of being accepted and heard. Loiter, with positive intent (even if you don't call it that). It may feel weird at first (even 'unproductive') yet it really, really works, big time.

UPDATE 1 March 2017: [Safety Performance Listening and Learning – AEROSPACE March 2017](#) (also online [here](#)).

Organisations need to be confident that they are hearing all the safety concerns and observations of their workforce. They also need the assurance that their safety decisions are being actioned. The RAeS Human Factors Group: Engineering (HFG:E) set out to find out a way to check if organisations are truly listening and learning.

The result was a self-reflective approach to find ways to stimulate improvement. See also: [Why Leaders Who Listen Achieve Breakthroughs](#)

UPDATE 14 March 2017: [9 strategies for becoming a super-communicator](#)

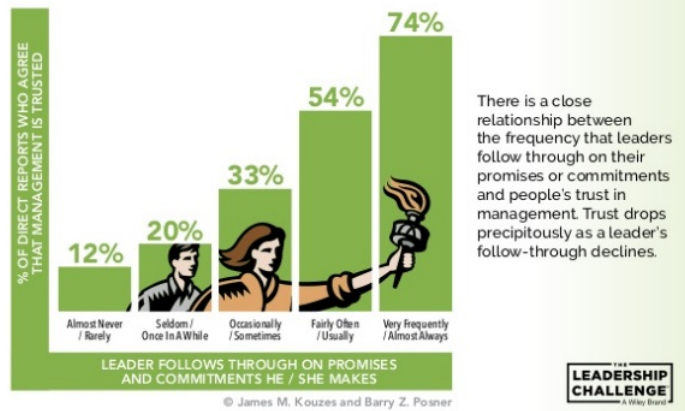
UPDATE 18 March 2017: Giving feedback is effectively is critical to good leadership and coaching. People often hide constructive criticism inside a compliment, and those on the receiving end never hear it. Is there a better way to provide feedback? Yes, according to this [New York Times](#) article: [You've Been Doing a Fantastic Job. Just One Thing ...](#)

UPDATE 21 March 2017: [How Middle Managers Provide Leadership Everyday](#)

Providing leadership as a middle manager requires an expanded understanding of your role and a willingness to take the risk to think and act more broadly.

UPDATE 22 March 2017: Which difference do you want to make through leadership? (a presentation based on the work of [Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner](#)). Note slide 6 in particular:

Leaders inspire trust.



UPDATE 23 March 2017: Whether you're a janitor or a CEO, this is what really makes you a leader

Leadership is the art of persuasion—the act of motivating people to do more than they ever thought possible in pursuit of a greater good. It has nothing to do with your title. It has nothing to do with authority or seniority. You're not a leader just because you have people reporting to you. And you don't suddenly become a leader once you reach a certain pay grade. A true leader influences others to be their best. Leadership is about social influence, not positional power.

UPDATE 25 March 2017: In a commentary on the NHS annual staff survey, trust is emphasised again:

Developing a culture where quality and improvement are central to an organisation's strategy requires high levels of trust, and trust that issues can be raised and dealt with as an opportunity for improvement. There is no doubt that without this learning culture, with trust as a central behaviour, errors and incidents will only increase.

UPDATE 4 April 2017: [What's Your Leadership Impact?](#)

UPDATE 12 April 2017: See our new article: [Leadership and Trust](#)

UPDATE 1 May 2017: What makes a great leader?:

1. Authenticity
2. Vulnerability (see the video below of [Brené Brown](#) and [Emma Sepala](#) in the [Harvard Business Review](#))
3. Tight/loose control (which again relates to trust)
4. Near/far thinking (Patience + Resilience)

The power of vulnerability | Brené Brown



UPDATE 25 May 2017: The concepts of “sensemaking”, “relating”, “visioning” and “inventing” are discussed in [Forget ‘strong and stable’ – leadership is about knowing your weaknesses](#)

UPDATE 26 May 2017: [Nigel Paine](#) comments:

Good leadership emerges from a culture of trust, trust is the fundamental building block of good leadership. And as we know, trust is hard to build, but very easy to destroy. Can you imagine being led well, by someone that you did not trust? It is inconceivable.

Nigel Paine - Why the toughest places are the best ...



UPDATE 30 May 2017: This slightly cynical piece discusses corporate values: [How Corporate Values Get Hijacked and Misused](#). The message is not that values are unimportant but that only defining values, or defining faux-values is worthless.

UPDATE 31 May 2017: The US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) commented on the poor organisational culture and leadership after the loss of [de Havilland DHC-3 Otter](#) floatplane, N270PA in a CFIT in Alaska and the loss of 9 lives: [All Aboard CFIT: Alaskan Sightseeing Fatal Flight](#)

UPDATE 21 June 2017: [Practical Dimensions of Change Leadership](#)

UPDATE 6 July 2017: Danielle Freude-Hellebrand explains that: [Slowly we are waking up to realize that a lot we've been taught about management and leadership is wrong.](#)

UPDATE 3 August 2017: Bob Keiller says: [If you want your staff to follow you, they need to trust you. If you want people to trust you, they need to know you.](#)

Doing Core Values | Bob Keiller | TEDxGlasgow

**UPDATE 10 August 2017: Good Leaders Are Good Learners**

*Although organizations spend more than \$24 billion annually on leadership development, many leaders who have attended leadership programs struggle to implement what they've learned. It's not because the programs are bad but because **leadership is best learned from experience**. Still, simply being an experienced leader doesn't elevate a person's skills. Like most of us, leaders often go through their experiences somewhat mindlessly, accomplishing tasks but learning little about themselves and their impact. Our research on leadership development shows that leaders who are in **learning mode** [defined as intentionally framing and pursuing each element of the experiential learning process with more of a growth than a fixed mindset] develop stronger leadership skills than their peers.*

UPDATE 27 August 2017: Boost your efficiency with a daily huddle: Unipart chief executive John Neill has improved productivity by listening to his staff.

The central premise of the Unipart Way is that the best ideas to boost efficiency come from the workers themselves. "No problem is a problem." Neill gives a recent example from an NHS hospital where the company is working. After being told by a senior consultant that a new £1m operating theatre was required, Neill went to see for himself. He gathered staff round and asked them what they thought. "It was like a fire hose of ideas," he says. A nurse told him that the operating theatre could carry out one more procedure a day, equivalent to an extra £750,000 of work annually, simply by employing a porter, so surgeons would not have to wait for their nursing teams to wheel patients back and forth before they could get started. Rather than paying for another theatre, "they could save a million pounds on new kit. It's so obvious, why wouldn't they do it?" he says. "But when I took it to management they just said, 'Oh, yeah, that lot are always complaining'."

UPDATE 30 August 2017: What's missing in leadership development?

*Leadership-development efforts have always foundered when participants learn new things, but then return to a rigid organization that disregards their efforts for change or even actively works against them. Given the pace of change today, adapting systems, processes, and culture that can support change-enabling leadership development is critically important. Technology can support organizational interventions that accelerate the process. For example, blogs, video messages, and social-media platforms help **leaders engage** with many more people as they seek to foster understanding, create conviction, and*

act as role models for the desired leadership behavior and competencies. Also critical are formal mechanisms (such as the performance-management system, the talent-review system, and shifts in organizational structure) for reinforcing the required changes in competencies. In our latest research, we found that successful leadership-development programs were roughly five to six times more likely to involve senior leaders acting as project sponsors, mentors, and coaches and to encompass adaptations to HR systems aimed at reinforcing the new leadership model.

UPDATE 24 December 2017: [The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture and What CEOs Get Wrong About Vision and How to Get It Right](#)

UPDATE 11 January 2018: [The Best Leaders Are Great Teachers:](#)

Learn what to teach, when to teach, and how to make your lessons stick. ...when you embrace the role of teacher, you build loyalty, turbocharge your team's development, and drive superior business performance.

You Have To Be a Player Before You Can Be a Coach:

The principles of Continuous Improvement can be applied to the practice of Continuous Improvement. We must all regularly reflect on our own approach, and identify 'gaps' from proper practice. Do we understand the defined direction of the organization, and aligning our improvements with it? Are we jumping to solutions or countermeasures before grasping current conditions? Are we 'checking' our biases throughout the process? Are we setting goals or targets before identifying countermeasures? Are we performing simple (and safe) experiments before making significant changes? Are we objectively assessing the effectiveness of experiments conducted through data? Are we practicing the full PDCA cycle?

UPDATE 16 January 2018: [A New Dependency: Our Addiction to Information and Approval are Killing Mission Command](#)

The idea of building mutual trust is not new. In fact, "building cohesive teams through mutual trust" is the first guiding principle of Mission Command.

UPDATE 3 February 2018: [As AI Makes More Decisions, the Nature of Leadership Will Change](#) Actually this article really suggests AI will take over many routine management data collection and analysis activities but leaving the true leadership activities. IT then discusses: humility, adaptability, vision and engagement.

UPDATE 7 February 2018: [Accountability is a MYTH](#)

It is everyone's favorite tagline. More accountability is what we need. If we need better results we can get there by cracking the whip on accountability.

It should be clear that the assumption is not true. There are so many variables....that this assumption is not grounded in any reality. Thus cracking the whip of accountability is a

fool's errand.

Instead let us focus in on 2 areas. How is the work designed and completed? How are we solving the obstacles and issues within it?

First, to build a good work design everyone has to understand where and how they fit in the bigger picture. Second, they need to know how to create that value and how to improve the work they do. Who is accountable for these two things? Leadership! These are the areas where I see the most issues when results aren't there.

UPDATE 8 February 2018: The UK Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) say: [Future safety requires new approaches to people development](#) They say that in the future rail system “there will be more complexity with more interlinked systems working together”:

...the role of many of our staff will change dramatically. The railway system of the future will require different skills from our workforce. There are likely to be fewer roles that require repetitive procedure following and more that require dynamic decision making, collaborating, working with data or providing a personalised service to customers. A seminal [white paper](#) on safety in air traffic control acknowledges the increasing difficulty of managing safety with rule compliance as the system complexity grows: ‘The consequences are that predictability is limited during both design and operation, and that it is impossible precisely to prescribe or even describe how work should be done.’ Since human performance cannot be completely prescribed, some degree of variability, flexibility or adaptivity is required for these future systems to work.

They recommend:

1. Invest in manager skills to build a trusting relationship at all levels.
2. Explore ‘work as done’ with an open mind.
3. Shift focus of development activities onto ‘how to make things go right’ not just ‘how to avoid things going wrong’.
4. Harness the power of ‘experts’ to help develop newly competent people within the context of normal work.
5. Recognise that workers may know more about what it takes for the system to work safely and efficiently than your trainers, and managers.

UPDATE 12 February 2018: Leadership is not just about senior management: [Leading by Example – NCOs are the Vital Ground](#). After an example to show why cultural values and standards must not be situational the author goes on:

We must be under no illusion that our Junior NCOs are the vital ground, the cohort critical to the future success of the British Army as it continues a period of painful re-adjustment, against the well-publicised fiscal constraints that will endure well into the next decade. The steps to ensure our Junior NCOs rise to the challenge are not, you will be relieved to read, anything unachievable or impractical. They simply acknowledge the requirement to go back to ‘first principles’, starting with the inculcation of a values based approach to leadership amongst our young leaders.

UPDATE 13 February 2018: Leaders at all levels have a responsibility to manage, as well as prepare, for absence: [The Machine Will Run Without You: A Checklist for Checking Out](#)

UPDATE 16 February 2018: [How to Increase Your Influence at Work](#)

UPDATE 1 March 2018: [How Leaders and Their Teams Can Stop Executive Hubris](#): Building a culture of critical thinking and humility can spare companies from the ravages of excessive CEO confidence.

UPDATE 2 March 2018: [Damning EY report reveals widespread cultural problems at Carillion](#)

UPDATE 9 April 2018: [Professor Dennis Tourish](#) (Professor of Leadership and Organisation Studies at the [University of Sussex](#)) discussed The Dangers of Hubristic Leadership: Lessons from the Finance Sector at a [British Army Centre for Army leadership annual conference in 2017](#). This included many horrific examples of hubris. He joked:

The banking sector has had a very bad press in the last number of years....That well-known Marxist magazine [The Economist](#) had a cover a couple of years ago called 'Banksters', published immediately after the [LIBOR scandal](#), drawing attention to the dysfunctional leadership behaviours and the greed and avarice that was common within that sector. When people in positions of authority acquire hubris it really does have a very serious, immediate organisational effect. In the banking and finance sector people described to me the enormous institutional pressure for success. Huge rewards if you achieve success but success defined pretty much by narrow financial terms. 'If we carry out this merger, this acquisition, or do these acts we will all get terribly rich'. So you can see the incentive there to go in that particular direction: high levels of reward, which is always associated with the acquisition of power.

He concluded:

Ultimately leadership is 90 percent example and unless we, and people in authority, role model that acceptance of dissent other people will not take it seriously. We need to lead with questions and not answers. We don't have to pretend to have all the answers when we are in positions of authority. We need to use that magic phrase 'I do not know.' There are many historical examples that show the value of that kind of approach. I think we have drifted away from it. We need to go back to it.

UPDATE 29 April 2018: [Counting the Costs of Winning: Doing the Right Thing, on a Difficult Day... When the Whole World is Watching](#)

In today's world of social media and smartphones the world is constantly watching. It is ready to make instant judgements, whether they be on military operations or a sports team's judgement. Perhaps now we should tell the Officer Cadets something different. Today the challenge of leadership is 'doing the right thing, on a difficult day, when you think no one will see... but the whole world is watching.'

"Leaders under pressure must keep themselves absolutely clean morally. The relativism of the social sciences will never do. They must lead by example, must be able to implant high-mindedness to their followers, and must have earned their followers' respect by demonstrating integrity." Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, 1987

UPDATE 30 April 2018: [The Best Leaders Are Constant Learners](#): "...leaders must scan the world for signals of change, and be able to react instantaneously. ...leaders bear a responsibility to renew their perspective in order to secure the relevance of their organizations."

UPDATE 13 May 2018: Safety leadership was a topic discussed at the [2018 HeliOffshore conference](#).

UPDATE 14 May 2018: [Don't Airbrush Leadership](#): don't let success stop you being critical.

UPDATE 17 June 2018: [The Psychologist Guide to... Leadership](#) Ten tips including 10. Be aware of your own power

Our every word, action, even a stern glance – incidental or otherwise – has greater consequence. Giant's whispers are shouts, their outbursts are explosions. Being a leader means never forgetting this.

UPDATE 17 July 2018: [Make Your Company's Culture Go Viral](#)

When faced with a challenge like spreading their critical few behaviors, most organizations will default to familiar ways of trying to encourage change — using a top-down communication cascade to deliver information. They may hang HR-produced posters where employees congregate, or send company-wide emails to introduce an initiative. But these methods are rarely sufficient in driving real behavior change.

Instead, identify **critical behaviours**, and follow the principles of **viral change**:

- Engage "Authentic informal leaders"
- Ensure leaders signal the behaviours
- Ensure formal systems are aligned

How Can You Make Your Company's Culture Go Vir...



UPDATE 8 August 2018: [Research: To Be a Good Leader, Start By Being a Good Follower](#)

...leadership is a process that emerges from a relationship between leaders and followers who are bound together by their understanding that they are members of the same social group. People will be more effective leaders when their behaviors indicate that they are one of us, because they share our values, concerns and experiences, and are doing it for us, by looking to advance the interests of the group rather than own personal interests.

UPDATE 31 August 2018: [How to be an effective leader at any stage of your career](#)

Leadership is something that you don't actually have to wait until you're a formal leader with five or 10 direct reports to practice. Anyone can exercise influence at work.

For example by being:

- The go-to person on a certain subject within your organisation
- Someone who thinks creatively and frequently shares ideas in meetings
- An active listener and consensus builder
- The colleague who's good at making everyone feel included and valued on the team
- A person who's effective at articulating how he or she thinks the organisation should move forward

UPDATE 17 September 2018: [How Self-Reflection Can Help Leaders Stay Motivated](#). This HBR article does fall into the trap of treating leadership as a noun, i.e. position related, rather than a verb, i.e. a behaviour, but otherwise some good thoughts of reflection.

UPDATE 23 September 2018: [How Transformation-Ready Leaders Learn](#) Learning agility is the ability to learn...not just in the classroom, or during a formal training, but on the fly throughout your day-to-day experience. Without learning agility, leaders are more likely to repeat past mistakes and will be less prepared for an uncertain future.

UPDATE 17 October 2018: [Leadership learning and development for Doctors](#)

Nearly all physicians take on significant leadership responsibilities over the course of their career, but unlike any other occupation where management skills are important, physicians are neither taught how to lead nor are they typically rewarded for good leadership. Trainee performance evaluations should explicitly assess for adequate progression of leadership capabilities, with targeted remediation available for those not demonstrating competency.

UPDATE 10 January 2019: [The 'Adding Value' Dilemma: An Interview with Lt Gen Richard Nugee the UK MOD's 3*Chief of Defence People](#).

People are at the heart of a leader's business. This is something every junior leader gets – you need to understand your people, put their needs before your own, motivate and develop them. It is at the centre of leading a team.

I've never really focused on long lists of leadership characteristics. I have found these quite dull and not much use. At my level, leadership is about being open to listening to junior people. They may not be as experienced, but that doesn't mean they don't have a view, or that the view is not valid – perhaps even more valid than your own! I live by the rule that if someone has gathered up the courage to see a three star or the CO, if it is important enough for them to need to see the boss, what right have I got to turn around and say "you are not important enough to see me".

...there are two things I have tried to live by as a senior leader:

The first is to ask questions. Not leading questions, but inquisitive questions. How do we deal with this? How could we make this work? This gives people the freedom, the permission, to talk to a senior leader and provide their wisdom.

The second is to say 'I don't know'. I always try ensure that every day I say 'I don't know' in answer to a question. I picked up the idea from reading [David Marquet](#). Saying 'I don't know' allows other people to tell you that they know or to give you ideas. Out of that comes so much more imagination than one person alone could ever produce.

What is leadership? - With David Marquet



UPDATE 12 January 2019: This article explores the value of vulnerability: [CEOs, Are You Vulnerable To Weakness And Lack Of Authenticity?](#)

A leader may determine that the risk is too great to share openly with one's entire team at first, so you may start by sharing your thoughts with individuals you trust on the team as a sounding board. This can help to get feedback and input on how to approach the team in a way that can give one more confidence in taking the risk.

UPDATE 13 January 2019: [Pathological to Generative. Moving up the Regulation Culture Ladder with Bruce.](#)

UPDATE 21 January 2019: [The Best Leaders Aren't Afraid to Ask for Help](#)

Leadership is about connection. People will only follow you, work hard for you, create and risk and sacrifice for you, if they feel connected to you.

UPDATE 26 January 2019: [Psychological safety, dialogue & teams](#)

UPDATE 27 January 2019: [Good Leaders Don't Disappear](#)

Simply said, you can't follow someone you can't see. That is why visibility and transparency mean so much in the realm of leadership. They are not just buzzwords; they produce the visceral experiences and tangible markers both potential and current followers evaluate as they mediate their level of trust and commitment to a leader.

This is one reason we don't like terms like 'Visible Leadership'. If you are invisible you are not leading and if you think you are in a leadership position and not leading you are just

deceiving yourself...

UPDATE 4 February 2019: A recent survey shows that **employees feel less positive about their workplace culture than their employers**. Five actions are proposed:

1. **Address where your culture and your strategy clash:** "No culture is all good or all bad. Every culture has emotional energy within it that can be leveraged" says [Jon Katzenbach](#).
2. **Change your listening tours:** "It takes more than ordinary listening to get a true understanding of the culture at your organization. Instead, challenge and foster healthy debate and real feedback from people across departments and across levels. Connect with people who are emotionally astute and who have insight into what people care about most."
3. **Identify the "critical few" behaviors that will shift your culture:** "Cultures don't change quickly, but a disciplined focus on these "critical few" can accelerate and catalyze a purposeful evolution. As people begin to adopt the behaviors, take time to recognize and reward those people for focusing on those behaviors, too."
4. **Step into the "show me" age:** "Right away, do something that's visible and concrete. If it succeeds and sends a positive message, repeat it-early and often. Then, encourage others to do the same. When your people see you leading by example, they're more likely to follow suit."
5. **Commit to culture as a continual, collaborative effort:** "...42% of respondents believe that their organization's culture has remained static for the last five years. 23% of employees report that leaders of their organizations have tried culture change or evolution of some form, but acknowledge that the efforts resulted in no discernible improvements. Influencing culture is hard, and most leaders declare victory too soon. It can't be a "one-off" project, nor can it be implemented top-down. Prepare to persevere through obstacles if you want long-term, sustainable change. The more ambitious the effort, the more time and more input from people at all levels it will demand".

UPDATE 24 March 2019: [Traeger's CEO on Cleaning Up a Toxic Culture](#)

UPDATE 26 March 2019: [Closing the Culture Gap: Linking rhetoric and reality in business transformation.](#)

*First and foremost, you must identify your organization's "critical few" traits: the core attributes that are unique and characteristic to it, that resonate with employees, and that can help spark their commitment. Next, you develop the **critical few** behaviors that, if executed repeatedly by more people more of the time, will move the habitual ways of working into better alignment with the organization's strategic and operational objectives. These behaviors should be tangible, repeatable, observable, and measurable. They are critical because they will have a significant impact on business performance when exhibited by large numbers of people. They are few because people can remember and change only three to five key behaviors at one time.*

The authors of this article recommend leaders:

- ground goals in what's possible
- tune in to emotions
- empower ALLs (authentic informal leaders) and (obviously!)...
- displaying behaviours consistently themselves

UPDATE 10 May 2019: [Is Your Corporate Culture Cultish?](#)

The acid test of good leadership is the ability to unlock the potential of followers to get the best out of them, not to create a corporate culture that enslaves them.

UPDATE 20 May 2019: Middle Managers Deserve More Respect Most employees follow their lead — maybe more CEOs should too.

While it's popular to blame managers for blocking change, far more often they are the transmitters of the "critical few" behaviours that have the potential to generate a real business impact and the 3 or 4 cultural traits that define a company's collective sense of identity.

UPDATE 10 June 2019: Want your people to achieve more than you thought was possible?

Prioritise psychological safety and employee engagement

UPDATE 9 July 2019: Why Leaders Who Listen Achieve Breakthroughs

UPDATE 21 June 2019: Why living your values takes work

Most people assume that values are an either/or issue: Good people have them and bad people don't. ...recent brain research shows that all people probably have blind spots they aren't aware of, which means there are many unexplored opportunities for constructive action — and unrealized ways for leaders to shape their company culture.

UPDATE 28 July 2019: Make Your Guiding Principles Useful

You Can Train Competence. You Can't Train Clarity
...if you want empowered and trusted people operating through mission command, your command philosophy needs to give your subordinates your intent and the boundaries in which they can operate.

In particular

1. *Make them short.*
2. *Make them usable decision making criteria.*
3. *Make them freedoms, not constraints.*
4. *Make them lived.*
5. *Make them matter. Make them enter the language of your organisation.*
6. *Make sure they are right. Most importantly, make sure you mean them.*

UPDATE 8 August 2019: Training Leaders for Success: The Mind of the Leader, Three key mental qualities essential for great leadership: mindfulness, selflessness and compassion.

Be mindful: When you are mindful, you are aware of the landscape of your mind from moment to moment.

Be selfless: Leadership is not about you but the people and the organization you lead. With selflessness, you take yourself out of the equation and consider the long-term benefits of others.

Be compassionate: Compassion is the intention to bring happiness to others. If you have ever had a compassionate leader, you know what it feels like: The person has your back and has your interest in mind.

UPDATE 20 August 2019: Authority alone won't get leaders very far

There's a difference between having followers and having subordinates, and effective leaders need followers, whose cooperation is built on trust.

If you want to be a real leader...remember that you must earn and keep your people's trust. They will carefully assess your attitude and actions, in particular whether you look out for others in addition to yourself. If their assessment is that you are trustworthy, they'll stick with you.

UPDATE 10 November 2019: A Breath of Fresh Air: Project Oxygen and the British Army

This article is about just that – how one organisation asked “what if good leadership does not matter?”; “if it does matter, how do we measure it?”; and “if we can measure it, can we work out what it is?” The organisation in question is Google. The project that answered these questions was Project Oxygen.

Project Oxygen began in 2008 when Michelle Donovan, a member of Google's People and Innovation Lab, known as the PiLab, asked: “What if everyone at Google had an amazing manager?” The project's name was taken from her early observation that “having a good manager is essential, like breathing. And if we make leaders better, it would be like a breath of fresh air.” Project Oxygen was born. And like every project in Google, it needed to deliver evidence based on a pretty high burden of proof.

UPDATE 13 November 2019: GlobalJet Execs: Positive Work Culture Boosts Safety

Aerossurance was pleased to again [sponsor](#) (and present at) the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics & Human Factors' (CIEHF) [Human Factors in Aviation Safety Conference 7-8 November 2016](#). We also presented at the Flight Safety Foundation's (FSF) [69th Annual International Air Safety Summit](#) in Dubai on 15 November 2016. In both we discussed 'The Great Training Robbery', the inappropriate use of training and the value of 70:20:10.

Later Tuesday morning, [Nick] Dahlstrom [Human Factors Manager at Emirates] spoke on Safety Culture in Maintenance during the IASS Maintenance & Engineering (M&E) track session and said that safety is about more than just data and that people create safety. “It's not your SMS (safety management system) manual that makes you safe, it's your people,” he said. He also cautioned that aviation as an industry is too focused on training and not focused enough on education. That sentiment was echoed by Andy Evans, director, Aerossurance, who said, “I'm not against training, but I'm more for learning.”

Aerossurance is [supporting](#) the annual Chartered Institute of Ergonomics & Human Factors' (CIEHF) [Human Factors in Aviation Safety Conference](#) for the third year running. This year the conference takes place 13 to 14 November 2017 at the [Hilton London Gatwick Airport](#), UK with the theme: **How do we improve human performance in today's aviation business?**



For experienced, innovative support and practical advice you can trust on safety leadership and safety culture development, contact Aerossurance at: enquiries@aerossurance.com

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