

Become the leader you are



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Lindsay Wittenberg

Become the leader you are

Self-Leadership Through Executive Coaching

Become the leader you are: Self-Leadership Through Executive Coaching

1st edition

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About the author

Lindsay Wittenberg is an executive coach, specialising in leadership, career re-focus, cross-cultural work, and wellbeing. She equips senior people to achieve sustained, positive change in thinking and behaviour, especially in contexts of pressure, focus on results, uncertainty, and demanding or radical change. Her clients, who are based globally:

- Become better at making well-grounded decisions and judgments
- Become more insightful, creative and resourceful
- Nurture productive working relationships

Lindsay was Highly Commended for Coaching at Work's Award 2015 for Best Thought Leadership.

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1 Introduction



Chapter 1: Photo by somebody via Compfight

1.1 High-quality leadership is the exception

High-quality leadership enables others to flourish, it creates engagement, inspires and stimulates discretionary effort, influences and motivates those within the leader's organisation and beyond it, and takes results to a higher level – sustainably.

1.2 Executive coaching for self-awareness

It's the developmental and transformational approach of the best executive coaching that can equip the leader (potential or current) to courageously examine their own practice in order to deliver leadership that will create a better organisation.

High-quality leadership isn't a check-list: it's a question of how the leader brings the essence of themselves to their role.

It demands self-awareness and self-understanding, awareness of how others tick and a capacity for the leader to put themselves in those others' shoes, an awareness of how the systems of relationships and influences around them work, a curiosity to keep learning (especially when things go wrong) and a discipline to keep applying the learning.

1.3 Executive coaching equips leaders to lead and self-lead

Executive coaching can uniquely equip leaders to lead and self-lead with integrity, authenticity and humility.

The executive coach is responsible for creating conditions in which the leader can become equipped to clarify and assess their situation, draw lessons from it, work out their options, create opportunities, make positive and sustainable changes, and make decisions that are congruent with the person they are, and what they want to achieve. The coaching journey enables the leader to create and discover insights which they can experiment with in the conduct of their own working lives ('self-leading') and then apply to leading others.

1.4 Authentic leadership and self-coaching

Leaders I coach achieve development and transformation: they make profound and sustained changes in themselves, in their teams, in the philosophy and practices of their organisations, and in the quality of outcomes they create. They learn to self-coach, becoming better able to question assumptions and old beliefs they might subconsciously have been carrying with them for years, understanding how to integrate new knowledge into their practice, and knowing at a profound level who they really are.

Their self-coaching engenders a capacity for self-leadership as a pre-condition for leading others. They tap in more fully to their capabilities – so they become more effective at achieving the outcomes they want.

They think freshly, from new perspectives, and feel safe enough to think creatively – so they create new solutions. They discover what helps them and what hinders them in achieving the right outcomes – so they're better able to make decisions and judgments which are well-grounded, and which make their results sustainable. They create and sustain productive working relationships and get the best out of their people. They propel their careers and their organisations forward, they learn what might be in their way – and they learn how to address those barriers.

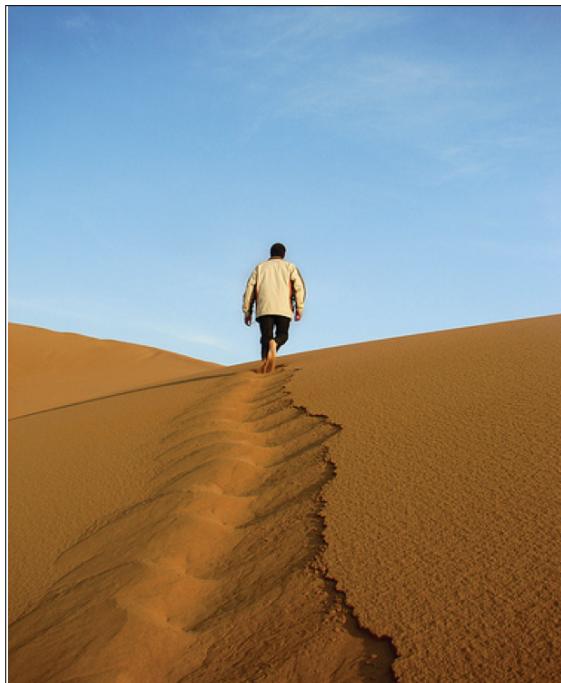
1.5 What's in this e-book

This e-book offers you reflections taken from my blog postings at [http://www.lindsaywittenberg.co.uk/
news-opinion/](http://www.lindsaywittenberg.co.uk/news-opinion/). It explores how areas and issues addressed in the executive coaching that I deliver can equip leaders to improve the quality of their leadership – and of their self-leadership. It aims to provide an insight into issues that I believe are significant in the journey towards higher-quality leadership. Each chapter gives you practical suggestions for engaging with those issues and making them part of your daily life, so that you can build a practice of self-coaching.

I place some emphasis on authenticity and self-awareness, on relationships and systemic thinking, and on the value of difference and diversity. And I consider emotional intelligence, resilience, neuroscience and mindfulness as areas of knowledge and practice which offer particular benefit to the leader.

I am grateful to all those from whom I have learnt (and continue to learn), who have stimulated my thinking, and who inspire me. If you'd like to discuss any of the topics I raise (or any that you think I could have raised), please get in touch at lw@lindsaywittenberg.co.uk, or +44/0 20 7112 7001.

2 Become the leader you are



Chapter 2: Photo by Hamed Saber via Compfight

2.1 My coaching ethos: become who you are

I recently had the opportunity to make a micro-presentation on my coaching approach to a group of internationally-based leaders. One of the points I emphasised was my belief that we all deliver our best by being who we are – and for most of us that means learning how to become who we are.

My belief comes from long experience of working with leaders who struggle to meet the models that other people expect them to conform to, and who feel liberated when they experience the ease – and for many, a personal peace – that comes with accepting and embracing that they are who they are. They invariably experience a parallel energy, even exhilaration, and a focus that mean that they leverage their strengths with courage and assertiveness, communicate powerfully on what matters to them, and – fascinatingly – empower their teams to deliver authentically on the vision they've communicated.

2.2 Leaders who could deliver more

After my presentation a member of the audience approached me, saying she'd been moved by what I'd said, and asking if I could let her have any material from which she could learn more about the topic. Something about her reminded me of leaders I've coached in the past who felt stuck, or daunted, or anxious about the leadership agenda facing them. People who knew they had the potential to deliver more as leaders, but didn't know how: they just knew that another training course wasn't going to be enough.

2.3 The link between authenticity and leadership

As tiny children we all occupy our authentic selves: we say what we mean, we follow the directions in which our interests take us, we accept our mistakes as part of everyday life without judging ourselves to be lacking or failing in some respect, and we get excited and joyful. We have an instinctive sense of self-care.

As we grow, we tend to take more and more account of other people's judgments. Sometimes we can allow what matters to us most fundamentally to be clouded, so that our own values are compromised. We can lose our joy in life and work in the interests of serving a family agenda, a school agenda or an organisational agenda. And we can get out of touch with the meaning of our lives and the place of work in them. Our communication may lack power because it lacks integrity. Some of us lose touch with self-care.

The more we are playing a role, the less compelling our communications, and the less inspiring we are before. We become more preoccupied with the appearance than with the reality of who we are and how we lead.

2.4 The quality of authentic leadership

Authentic leadership isn't easy to achieve, given the need to constantly balance the tension between organisational imperatives and personal drivers and values. However, it is achievable, given a preparedness for reflection and an exploration of what's really going on.

My hope for the leader who approached me is that she will set out on a journey of discovery that will lead her to see, understand, accept, and engage with what matters to her, what drives and energises her, and what and who inspire her. In beginning and sustaining this journey she is likely to become the best leader she can be. She will engage others in her vision and her integrity, and she will inspire her team, and their teams, to be the best they can be too.

2.5 Practical pointers

- At the end of every working day, take five minutes to write down:
 - two occasions when you haven't said what you really mean
 - the emotional reason behind what you did say
 - the outcomes you achieved by saying what you said
- At the end of every Friday afternoon write down:
 - your moments of feeling high and feeling low during the week
 - whose opinion has influenced your behaviour to the extent that you've compromised on what you believe to be important

3 Leadership coaching



Chapter 3: Photo by Simon & His Camera via Compfight

3.1 Resources and resourcefulness

The leader's daily ration is one of juggling complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and pressure to achieve.

Out of it all he or she needs to produce the clarity, focus and direction that will inspire, motivate and engage their workforce to deliver on the strategic agenda. They need to maintain and develop their own resources and their own resourcefulness so that they release more of their own talent and that of their people.



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Their position is often solitary, and they often lack both the challenge and the feedback from those around them that could help them expand their thinking, consider different perspectives and achieve greater balance.

3.2 The motivation for coaching

This juxtaposition of complex demands, on the one hand, with a sense that they could be moving from good or great to outstanding, on the other, is often the motivation for leaders to seek leadership coaching with an external executive coach. Having no vested interest but able both to facilitate and deliver insight, the coach works collaboratively so as to enable development and transformation.

3.3 How to gain the most from leadership coaching

Leaders who embrace the coaching process stand to gain the most from leadership coaching. So too will those who are prepared to experiment with well-judged change, to reflect, to take steps into the apparently unsafe territory of their own vulnerabilities, and to recognise that who they really are is profoundly relevant to how they perform.

3.4 Challenges that leaders bring to coaching

In my experience the challenges that are the most preoccupying for leaders are those where they are puzzled, surprised or confronted by their own thinking patterns, reactions or behaviours – for example, unexpectedly finding that their self-confidence is undermined, tussling with an apparent incapacity to manage time effectively, reacting emotionally when challenged.... The list is endless.

3.5 Coaching outcomes

I aim to facilitate coaching clients to uncover – and, when appropriate, to shift – patterns in their emotions, behaviour, thinking, relationships, systems, and the stories they tell, especially when these have been keeping them stuck.

They become more authentic, they see more clearly what kind of leaders they want to be – and how. They learn how to respond rather than react, in a fuller awareness of the choices they make.

They become able to manage the apparent paradoxes between personal and organisational imperatives. They learn how to identify and manage the unconscious loyalties that keep them tethered to inappropriate beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (learn more about unconscious loyalties through the work of Bert Hellinger – see <http://www.hellingerpa.com/>).

3.6 Risky thinking

The coaching relationship is both platform and anchor: I accept the client as they are rather than judge them, I'm connected but separate, I support and I challenge. In my experience this creates a trust in which the leader feels safe enough to do the risky thinking that they can't do outside the coaching context. This maximises the opportunities for growth, change, development and transformation to occur (learn more through the work of Carl Rogers – see Chapter 24: Bibliography)

3.7 Self-coaching

My coaching clients learn how to self-coach and enable autonomy in individuals and in teams, facilitate learning, engage with the creativity that emerges in organisations which are open to learning and initiative, delegate, offer and receive feedback, and find reward in others' development and achievement (again see Carl Rogers in Chapter 24: Bibliography).

3.8 Practical pointers

Here's a mini self-coaching exercise:

- What's the issue that most preoccupies you as a leader
- make a 'map' of the elements that are involved in this issue, positioning Post-Its to represent the elements?
- If the issue was resolved what would it look like (again use your Post-Its)
- What's in the way of the resolution?
- What might you be assuming?
- List three or four options for action now

4 Self-awareness and self-understanding



Chapter 4: Photo by Tai Viinikka via Compfight

4.1 Self-awareness: the heart of executive coaching

In these times of economic stringency, focus on return on investment, and the organisational (and individual) need to get more from less, I'm giving a big 'thumbs up' to '[Why CEOs Don't Want Executive Coaching](#)', an article by business psychologist Douglas LaBier.

4.2 Self-awareness is critical to effectiveness

LaBier suggests that most coaching programmes omit or misconstrue the core coaching element that CEOs need in order to grow their skills and effectiveness: namely self-awareness. Self-awareness is critical to developing effective, inspiring, engaging leadership that maximises relationships, empathy, compassion and persuasion. Only with self-awareness can the leader internalise – and thus deliver with the impact that authenticity brings – skills such as conflict management, relationship-building or effective communication.

4.3 Coaching is developmental, not remedial

LaBier also flags the faulty perception by some leaders of coaching as remedial (as though there's something wrong with them) rather than developmental (the client is already a high achiever and wants to get even better), and suggests that this too accounts for the gap between CEOs' wanting and having coaching.

4.4 The leader needs to care about their followers

My belief is that leadership is about inspiring and engaging other people so they deliver what they're really capable of: in other words, enabling human flourishing. In a limited way, leaders can get things done by being autocratic and controlling, but this doesn't generally bring engagement or discretionary effort, enthusiasm or sustainability unless the leader inspires fear (as tyrants do) – and then one has to question the moral basis of their agenda. If leaders are to consistently get things done through other people they need to create and nurture trusting, vibrant relationships, to inspire with a vision, to persuade and energise, to engage with other people's perspectives, and to care about their people.

4.5 Connecting with others depends on connecting with self

This ability to connect with others is crucially dependent on the ability to connect with oneself: to become aware of one's own behaviours and thinking, of the connection between those behaviours and thinking patterns and the outcomes the leader creates, of their values and the beliefs that act as drivers or inhibitors.

If a leader believes, for example, that praising people or recognising achievements is 'soft' or pointless, or that the only feedback worth giving is criticism, they may fail to value individuals for what they *are* contributing. And people who don't feel valued become demotivated and disengaged, which in turn will impact business and organisational results.

4.6 The difficult messages can be the eye openers

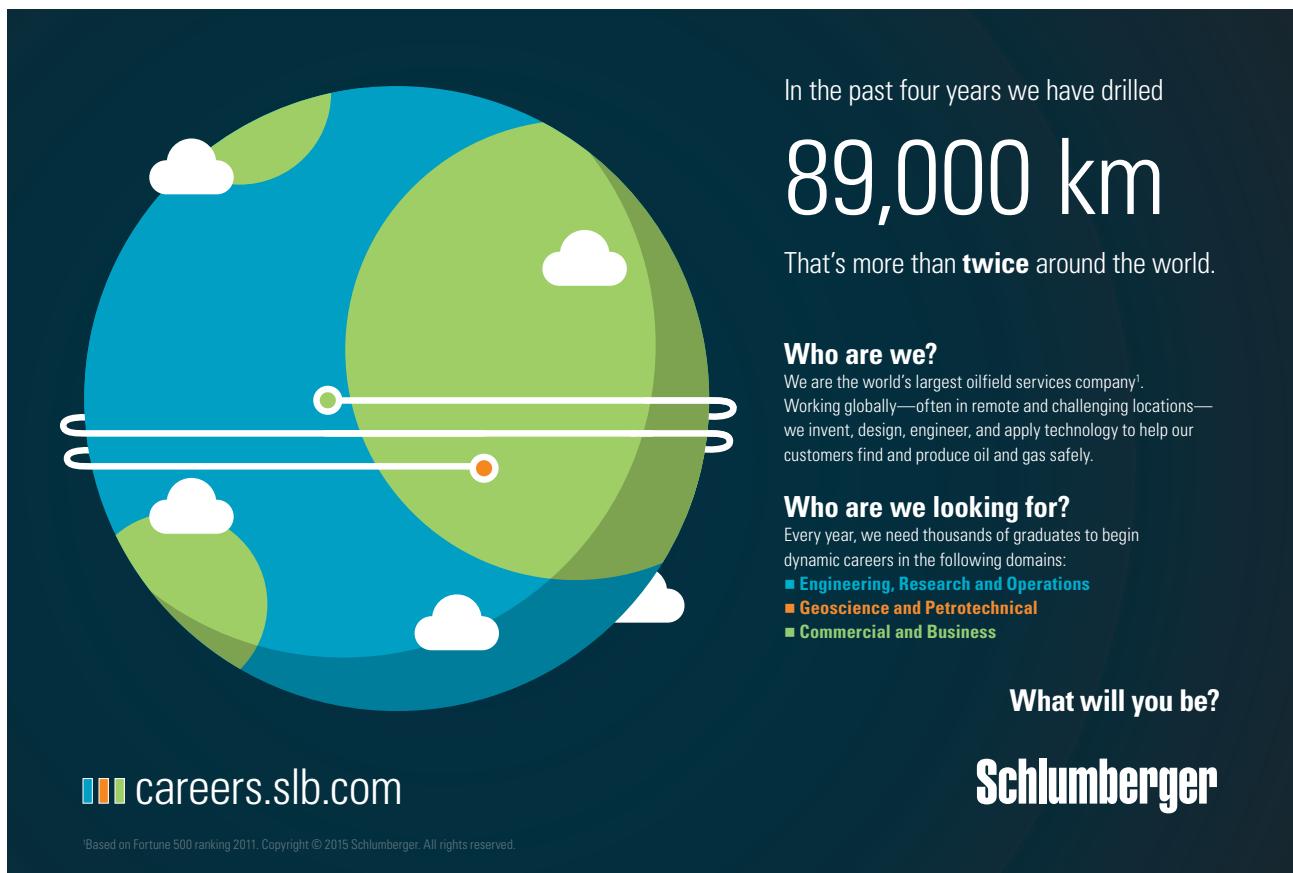
For any individual the most difficult part of building self-awareness is to face the messages that they may have spent a lifetime hiding from or denying (usually unconsciously), and for them to 're-decide' or re-choose how to respond to them. In my experience, when a client recognises the continuing impact at work of a belief that, for example, taking account of how others feel is irrelevant, or that they need to be in absolute control, that awareness alone can create change – and sometimes transformation.

This process of equipping a client to become deeply self-aware is at the heart of executive coaching. Clients of mine refer to the process as 'eye-opening' or 'life-changing' in the same breath as 'really tough' or 'challenging'.

Plumbing the depths (or indeed scaling the heights) of self-awareness is what can make a profound difference to the quality of their leadership.

4.7 Practical pointers

- Start developing the habit of self-awareness:
 - Mid-way through each day, take five minutes to write down:
 - An occasion when you have performed at or near your peak in the previous 24 hours
 - The physical sensations you had
 - The emotions you were feeling
 - What you noticed about your impact on those around you
 - When you're in conversation with another person, become an observer to yourself:
 - Build your awareness of what you're thinking
 - Be aware of your body language
 - Notice your reactions to what the other person is saying



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5 We're all part of the systems



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5.1 We all function within several systems

I've been deepening my learning about systems – the understanding that no man (or woman) is an island (thank you, John Whittington of [Coaching Constellations](#)). Although we're all independent human beings, we're also interdependent, functioning within several systems simultaneously that provide the frameworks for our relationships to people and organisations, decisions and achievements, beliefs and attitudes. And of course beliefs and attitudes are closely connected to our emotions and our behaviours.

5.2 Bringing alive what's not said or seen

Looking at individual coaching clients through a systemic lens means that I can bring alive things that are not normally said or seen. The newly-arrived Board Director who is frustrated by the established organisational culture of failing to honestly address possibilities for improvement.... The leader who is puzzled about why – and how – his two teams communicate poorly.... The executive who believes that all inadequacies are down to 'the others'....

5.3 Individual and systemic awareness

All of these challenges can be usefully explored, and meaningful change can be created and sustained, by a combination of individual *and* systemic self-awareness and development.

I'm finding especially interesting the impact of an individual's previous systems on their current systems. What are they bringing with them from their previous role and organisation to their current one – what unresolved disappointments, what learning that they have never expressed their gratitude for? And what are they failing to acknowledge about their new organisation?

5.4 Acknowledgment: the key to the door

The simple act of acknowledgment can bring about clarity and can release a team to fulfil their potential without continuing to be caught up in outdated patterns. Even without the leader being fully conscious of what is happening below the surface they can find that when they do make such acknowledgments suddenly things flow in the direction they intend.

In my experience a leader can be so intent on the change they want for the future of their team or organisation, or so caught up in what hasn't worked in the past, that they don't acknowledge the contribution of what happened in the past towards creating the present. And so they may miss the systemic messages that can make all the difference to a strategy, whether for retention, profitability, team cohesion, efficiency – or many of the other challenges that organisations face.

5.5 Who or what has been excluded?

One type of systemic message concerns who or what has been excluded: whose unacknowledged contribution in the past made the present possible? The CFO who kept the organisation going by running both finance and operations before an additional leader was recruited....The Sales Director who introduced a new process that boosted sales figures for the long term, but who left the organisation and is no longer talked about....

5.6 Beyond apparent logic

I find that a systemic perspective is especially valuable for explaining why a relationship, process, decision or conflict is failing to progress, because looking at it systemically gets beyond the apparent logic or rationale. Human beings don't always behave logically or rationally, and a systemic approach can resolve what's illogical or irrational – a Board which doesn't 'get' a logically explained proposal, feedback which is unclear or internally inconsistent, internal competition which seems not to make sense in the context of the values that the team have signed up to.

5.7 Practical pointers

- When you find yourself in confrontation with another person or faced with a dilemma, take a couple of minutes to reflect on what or who you may be unconsciously loyal to. Is that loyalty still appropriate? What might you want to change?
- As you approach your next decision, ask yourself:
 - Who is influencing this decision?
 - What in this organisation will be influenced by this decision?
- Who has had an influence on your arrival at this point in your career? What do you want to acknowledge about their contribution, whether negative or positive?

6 Relationships and connection



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6.1 Leaders function in relationship to others

In all that's written and spoken about leadership, there's a danger of the effective leader being portrayed as a solitary figure who gains power from that very isolation, and of their team being presented as disconnected from them. Of course, the truth is that – like all human beings – the leader can only function in relationship. Their relationships are with other humans as well as with issues and factors that affect their existence and effectiveness – career path, organisational agenda and culture, economic, political and technical environment, emotional climate and so on.

6.2 Leaders' effectiveness is linked to listening and connecting

One definition of a leader is 'someone who gets things done through others' – someone whose team is achieving the leader's vision.

I'm hearing more stories of leaders who listen to their teams – and who see in return greater engagement, better retention rates and bigger, more long-lasting results. This is a tough call for leaders who urgently want to or need to get things done fast, or who have no patience or time to listen to others. However, ultimately, without that kind of truly connecting and collaborative approach, the leader's results will be limited by their own capacity. The alternative is the creation of results through synergies and connections – creating more out of the available resources.

6.3 Mandela's collaborative leadership

Much has been written about that icon of leadership and champion of team working, Nelson Mandela. Among the commentators on his legacy, Semhar Araia, founder and executive director of the Diaspora African Women's Network, [wrote](#) in 2012: 'His actions showed that real leadership is collaborative, collective and inclusive – exactly the opposite of authoritative, corrupt or inflexible approaches. It is having steadfast focus on the common goal with forgiving flexibility, inclusiveness and the vision to adjust to human conditions'.

The power and reach of such a collaborative approach is highlighted by Geoff Thompson, a former martial arts world champion, who has [written](#): 'Nelson Mandela created, fostered and even demanded a collaborative, inclusive culture within the new South African government. It was this cultivation and expectation of collaboration, modelled by Mandela himself, that allowed the country's decision-makers to let go of their original mentality: "my people's agenda vs. yours" – a mentality that was palpable at every turn when Mandela took office in 1994. Beyond all else, Mandela's fostering of a collaborative and inclusive culture (and country) was the key to avoiding a civil war – a war that had seemed almost inevitable'.

Does Mandela's approach remind you of any organisation you know?

6.4 A collaborative style of leadership strengthens the team

This kind of collaboration means spending time not only listening, but also understanding, connecting and engaging: through an approach like this, a team's targets become sustainable, and cohesion between team members is strengthened (see a [case study](#)). Not only do targets become more meaningful and more energising, but team members become more committed to each other, so – like a spider's web – the whole system is strengthened because its internal connections are more resilient.

6.5 Practical pointers

- Map out your strategic relationships: choosing a bounded space (e.g. your desk), position one Post-It to represent yourself. Using small Post-Its of all the same colour, position six Post-Its to represent six team members who impact on you. Then, using Post-Its of a different colour, position in the same space another six team members you impact on (some Post-Its may end up sitting on top of each other)
 - What do you notice about the map you've created and the position of each Post-It?
 - In relation to your connection with each person on the map, how do you listen to what they have to say? As they speak, are you thinking about what you're going to say next or are you engaged with what they're saying?
 - How clearly do you understand what matters to each of the people on your map?
 - What is the quality of the outcomes you achieve through each person?

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7 Managing your emotions so as to lead others



Chapter 7: Photo by Len Matthews via Compfight

7.1 How emotional intelligence shows up

Have you ever seen a colleague – or a boss – lose their cool? Emotions well up, uncontrolled, and dominate the situation while rationality and calmness get sidelined. Have you been in conversation or negotiation with someone who sticks doggedly to their own script without engaging with your – or others’ – viewpoints? In contrast, what happens to your engagement when a colleague or boss allows you space to be heard and who engages with your experience?

This is all about emotional intelligence.

7.2 Choosing your response

The leader who has a level of self-awareness that allows them the insights they need in order to manage their emotions and behaviour gives themselves choices about how they behave: their emotions won’t be in charge – and their rationality will. Under stress and pressure the leader with self-awareness can more easily choose their responses – perhaps to look for the learning or to actively seek perspectives other than their own.

7.3 Stepping back emotionally

The days of heroic leadership are gone. The model of the all-powerful, autocratic leader who acts alone has been discredited. And the leader who builds on, and develops, their emotional self-awareness in such a way that they can step back emotionally from situations to put their own reactions on hold, and empathise with the players in those situations, will find that they are more connected with their people, and that higher levels of trust, performance, engagement and discretionary effort – rather than obedience or compliance – follow.

7.4 Empathy and the exceptional leader

The capacity for empathy is often what distinguishes exceptional leaders. The Centre for Creative Leadership, in its 2007 study '[Empathy in the Workplace](#)', analysed data from 6,731 managers from 38 countries. They discovered that managers who show more empathy toward direct reports are viewed by their bosses as better performers, particularly in cultures where the belief is that power should be concentrated at higher levels.

7.5 Emotional intelligence can be learnt

Of all the intelligences, emotional intelligence is one that can be learnt.

A [Harvard Business Review blog](#) by Christine M Riordan suggests that three notable behaviour sets are connected with empathic listening:

1. Recognising all verbal and nonverbal cues, including tone, facial expressions, and other body language. Sensitive leaders pay attention to what others are not saying and probe a bit deeper to get to the real message.
2. Processing, which involves understanding the meaning of the messages, keeping track of the points of the conversation, and articulating those points.
3. Responding, which involves assuring others that listening has occurred and encouraging communication to continue.

7.6 Leadership outcomes from emotional intelligence

Empathy is a key factor in transformational leadership – leadership which enables a shift in performance and effectiveness. A client of mine who had built his emotional intelligence remarked at the end of his coaching programme:

'I've become more communicative: I can guide my reports rather than do the job for them. The team's working efficiently and at a high level. I'm listening more and I'm less excitable: I'm calmer and more measured. Team members are stepping up to take responsibility: they feel more capable and confident to integrate with me. The one big thing that has changed is my presence and leadership, which gives people confidence and encouragement.'

QED.

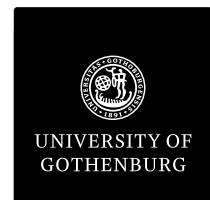
7.7 Practical pointers

- Notice your response to the next unwelcome surprise. What emotion are you experiencing, and how does it show up in your behaviour or verbal expression? Is that behaviour or verbal expression the one that will bring you the best outcome?
- What are the physical sensations that accompany the emotion? Start using them as signals to take two or three seconds' thought to choose the response you want
- When a report brings you bad news, notice their body language. What might it indicate about how they're feeling? Listen for longer than you might have been inclined to do
- In the same situation, what might be your options for managing the emotions you see being expressed in front of you?

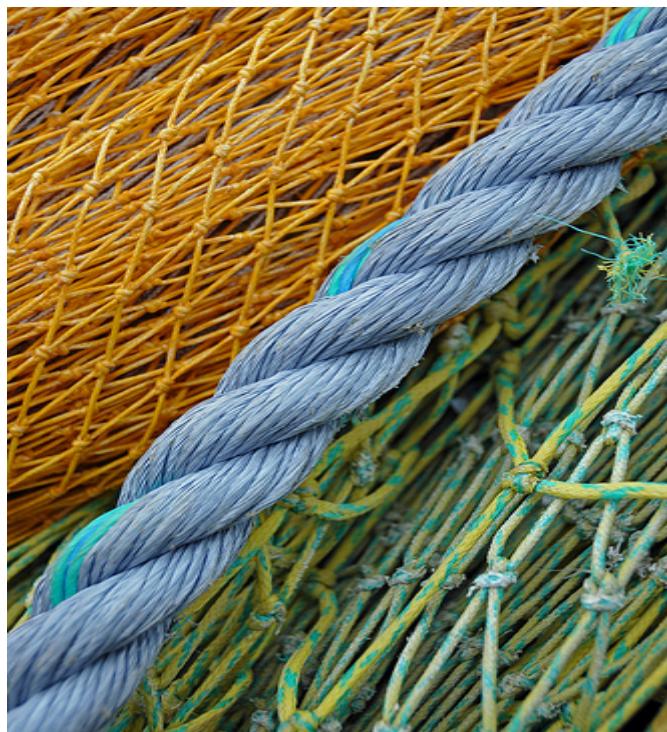
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8 Resilience, the bottom line and Ordinary Magic



Chapter 8: Photo by Dennis Jarvis via Compfight

8.1 Resilience: a direct connection with revenue growth

An article published in Forbes by Jan Bruce on '[The Vital Link between Resilience and Your Bottom Line](#)' highlights the author's reframing of resilience not as a nice-to-have but as directly connected with revenue growth via the connection between resilience and engagement.

8.2 Building resilience is a constant

Bruce also quotes Rosabeth Moss Kanter (see '[Surprises Are the New Normal; Resilience Is the New Skill](#)'): stress 'isn't a pothole to avoid but the very nature of the road we travel daily'. That resonates for me: my executive coaching clients occasionally make explicit their quest to build resilience, but much more often building resilience is a constant, a part of the backdrop to their working lives and intrinsic to the way they approach their leadership agenda. And so resilience becomes the backdrop to my coaching, feeding in to – and from – the articulation of the leader's values and motivations and how they live them, their purpose, the systems of relationships and community that they create and move in, the confidence they build in themselves and others, and expanding their perspectives on the options for thinking and behaviour that can nourish and build the quality of their leadership.

8.3 Four factors for resilience

There's a link here with the four factors that wellbeing specialists Robertson Cooper have identified in their [i-resilience model](#): adaptability, purpose, self-confidence, and support. Without being conscious of it, I've been working to this model virtually every time I deliver executive coaching.

8.4 Don't just keep going: keep learning

Bruce makes another powerful point: success isn't about travelling a smoother road but rather about climbing out of the pothole and bouncing back – and the key to being able to do that isn't just to keep going, but to keep learning. It can feel like the hardest thing to do – to focus on the learning when you're feeling defeated, disappointed or shocked – but learning is the key to creating an organisational culture where creativity and innovation are encouraged, risks (albeit well-judged) are taken and confidence is built. Organisations with such a culture are, in the process, future-proofing themselves and building success through resilient, engaged workforces.

8.5 Ordinary Magic

I've also been fascinated by the work of Ann Masten, Professor of Child Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Listen to her talk ['Inside resilient children'](#).

In her article ['Ordinary Magic'](#), Ann Masten comments that children's resilience is linked to: connection with competent and caring adults, cognitive and self-regulation skills, positive views of the self, and motivation to be effective. Unsurprisingly, since experiences in their childhoods link directly to leaders' style and achievements, I sometimes find that my executive coaching sessions range over these issues and challenges, and how they manifest in adulthood.

Why the term Ordinary Magic? Masten says that resilience doesn't require anything special or unusual – but it does require the operation of basic adaptive systems, which include healthy attachment relationships, neurocognitive control systems, and community. Damage to resilience is not caused by adversity itself but by damage to these basic adaptive systems in the context of adversity.

It applies to leaders just as much as to children.

Thought-provoking stuff.

8.6 Practical pointers

- When you're facing a challenge, get into the habit of identifying what you're learning, and reminding yourself what you learnt from your last difficult experience. Take 5 minutes to step back, collect yourself, and – critically – write it down.
- Write down what happens to your thinking, your bodily sensations and your emotions when your resilience falls
- Write down what happens to your thinking, your bodily sensations and your emotions when your resilience is robust
- Write down who can support you when times are tough. Get into the habit of revisiting that list every week for two or three minutes.

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9 Leadership development



Chapter 9: Photo by Nina Matthews via Compfight

9.1 What kind of leadership are we developing?

Many of the resources available to educate, support, challenge and inform current and aspiring leaders to develop their leadership extol the value of leadership which enables, facilitates and releases individuals' capability. And yet a conception of leadership which is about telling people what to do, micromanaging them to do it, and demanding compliance is disturbingly common.

9.2 Leadership qualities

Leadership development means embracing the challenges and being courageous enough to be open to learning, whether that learning is unpalatable or affirming. It means being curious, vulnerable and invested in understanding the systemic factors that shape beliefs, behaviours and relationships. It means learning that can't simply be taken from a textbook. It means the leader raising their self-awareness to gain insight into their drivers, strengths, and purpose – and into what inhibits them from achieving the outcomes they really want.

9.3 Six mental stances for top quality leadership

In my view, six mental stances characterise top leaders: those who create and sustain high-performing organisations, and who perpetually raise the quality of their own and other people's work:

1. **Being people-centred and demonstrating humanity:** understanding what motivates human beings and knowing how to connect with them and release the best in them. Dr Lesley Bromley, former Director of Postgraduate Medical Education at University College London Hospitals, understood deeply how to connect with doctors' development and potential by acknowledging the individuality of each of their capabilities, drivers, passions, ambitions and inhibitors.

2. **Having integrity:** I've had the privilege of coaching senior people whose CEOs subscribed to a set of ethical values and delivered on them consistently. The effects on trust, engagement and motivation – and hence productivity – of such behaviour were impressive.
3. **Being authentic:** Knowing oneself and being comfortable to bring that self to the task of leadership. In my experience the leader who learns how to be authentic has gravitas and courage, and is compelling and inspiring to follow. Having faced both their angels and their demons, they have learnt how to manage the tensions between individual and organisational values and imperatives. Think Anita Roddick, Founder of the Body Shop.
4. **Being open to learning:** Tough learning through listening to others' views and feedback can be especially valuable. Some of the most impactful learning I've witnessed in coaching clients has been when an individual has sought honest feedback, some of which has been difficult to accept and process. In accepting and processing it, and doing things differently as a consequence, they have enabled transformation for both themselves and their teams.
5. **Being courageous:** Frequently coming from a strong sense of purpose, a preparedness to stretch beyond what feels comfortable, and to inspire with an ambitious vision and belief in people's capacity. I recall a UNICEF leader I coached. Operating in war zones and terrorist zones that posed risks to her life and the lives of her team members, she unified her teams and equipped them to achieve what had previously seemed impossible to them.
6. **Understanding the system:** The leader's exploring, acknowledging and understanding the influences, the unconscious loyalties and the relationships that impact on them, their teams and the outcomes they achieve enables clarity on what is really happening and what the opportunities for change and development are.

9.4 Practical pointers

- Start observing your own style of leadership in different situations: when are you autocratic, when are you consultative or democratic, when are you in coaching mode? When do you lead from the front and when from behind?
- Write down what drives you on: what gives you energy and what inspires you?
- Listen and watch for what motivates your team members, and think about how that relates to their best work
- Write down who and what you impact, and who and what impacts you. Then do the exercise again by asking yourself 'Who else?' and 'What else?'

10 Authentic leadership



Chapter 10: Photo by Alasam via Compfight



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10.1 The struggle to inhabit our own authenticity

It can be a struggle to get comfortable with our own authenticity. What an irony that is: that it should be so difficult to be comfortable with who we are. After all, who could it be more comfortable to be? And yet the fear of rejection and the need for acceptance can not only be deeply rooted but also disabling, or at worst, paralysing. It's often bound up with a lack of self-esteem, a lack of self-worth or a lack of self-belief. For a leader it can be disastrous.

10.2 The ideal organisation: diversity is encouraged

And the opposite – a leader who's at ease with him- or herself, and with expressing who they are – can inspire a workforce to outperform itself. An article in Harvard Business Review, May 13, '[Creating the Best Workplace on Earth](#)' by leadership specialists Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, presents the results of research asking hundreds of executives to describe their ideal organisation. The authors state: people will not follow a leader they feel is inauthentic.

10.3 Sir Richard Branson: an example of authentic leadership

Look, for example, at Sir Richard Branson: he's been successful across a wide range of businesses, but he's had his share of failures too. What's striking about him is his willingness to experiment (but not recklessly), to innovate, and to learn from his experience. He believes in his vision and in who he is.

Richard Branson's leadership is often characterised as authentic leadership. He is responsive to people's needs and values. He is transparent, morally grounded and eager to receive feedback from others. He involves others in his work and often consults. He builds relationships.

He leads by example, he's said to behave with integrity and he looks for what's going right (as opposed to what's going wrong). He's inspiring and courageous. He leads organisations which are enabling rather than disabling.

10.4 The rewards of authenticity

A recent coaching client of mine – in the field of marketing and communications – struggled for several years to create the value in her organisation that she knew she was capable of by bringing her unique style, knowledge and experience. She was up against a male-dominated culture that had been in place for rather longer than she had and which she found oppressive and excluding. She was able to find her true place only when she discovered who she was. Going beyond that style, knowledge and experience, she gained clarity on her purpose, values and intrinsic motivations, and how they connected with her talents, and she got past the internal barriers to discover how to bring them all to her work with integrity.

That's not to say it was an easy or a short journey, but it enabled her to find personal balance and consistent positive energy which transmitted itself to those around her and made a real difference to productivity and effectiveness.

10.5 The path to authentic leadership: self-awareness and ‘being’

For me, an authentic leader is a leader who is true to himself or herself, who therefore engenders trust, and who is able to manage with integrity the tensions between their own agenda and that of their organisation.

The first and most fundamental step on this path is the journey towards self-awareness. It's a journey that never really ends. And it's a journey that is about 'being' more than 'doing': those who realise that leadership is about how you 'be' far more than it is about what you do are those who have understood the essence of effective leadership.

10.6 Practical pointers

- Recall an instance when you haven't been true to yourself and your values: what would have made it possible to be who you really are?
- Recall an occasion when you **have** been true to yourself, but it took a bit of effort: what did that effort consist of?
- How consistent are you in the values you express and the way you live them?
- What have you learnt or realised through this exercise?

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11 Trust: a critical element of leadership



Chapter 11: Photo by Eyþór Björnsson via Compfight

11.1 Lack of trust on the front line

A senior hospital registrar recently shared a depressing story with me. A dynamic, engaged, talented individual, on one of his hospital rotations he was finding himself demotivated and disengaged by the behaviour of his consultant (the equivalent of his line manager). She consistently promised to take actions that he was dependent on her for – and she consistently failed to deliver on those commitments. She invariably failed to attend meetings she'd arranged with him. And she seemed not to see the value of his contributions or competence.

During his time in this hospital, and as part of a research project that she was supervising, the registrar had developed a new procedure which the consultant had approved and which now needed testing: when an ideal opportunity arose for her to use and test the procedure herself, she dismissed it, saying she had no time for it. He was left dismayed and disillusioned not only by this dismissal, but also by her inaccessibility and unreliability, his trust shattered.

His motivation and commitment levels suffered, and he began to struggle to work with his usual energy and engagement. He spent emotional energy on disappointment at his (and his colleagues') inability to count on his boss's true participation as a team leader.

11.2 Leaders who succeed through building trust

In contrast, leaders I've worked with who have built high-performing teams have done so by consistently being clear about – and living – their values, by being transparent and conveying clear, unequivocal commitments which they stayed loyal to, no matter how challenging this was. They respected and valued others' contributions (and took tough action when their people didn't measure up to the contract for delivery), and they demonstrated loyalty to the organisational and team agendas. Adopting this approach, one client – a CEO – steered her organisation through the toughest financial pressures of its existence and through a difficult restructuring which respected individuals and the impact on the organisation of changes to their roles. The organisation emerged not only with a high level of engagement but also with fresh energy for their changing business scenario.

11.3 Trust: an increasingly frequent coaching issue

I'm noticing the theme of trust coming up increasingly often in coaching sessions, both explicitly and as part of the context for clients' coaching challenges.

At an organisational level some leaders I coach are identifying trust as a key enabler for getting the results their organisations need: they're understanding – sometimes for the first time in their careers – that their relationships at work need to be nurtured and that they need to be able to trust their teams if they're going to get the engagement, commitment and discretionary effort that will take results to the next level.

11.4 Trust is reciprocal

It can come as a surprise for them to realise that the process is reciprocal: their teams need to be able to trust them too, and consequently they're working harder on their own transparency, consistency, reliability and accountability, and on time spent in personal communication and interaction.

11.5 Leaders get more from their teams

One of the outcomes of development of this kind is that leaders find themselves getting more from their teams without much apparent effort. The members of those teams take more initiative and more responsibility, so that there's a healthier balance in the distribution of power and the intensity of control, and less impetus to micromanage.

11.6 Practical pointers

- Recall a trusting relationship in your career to date. What outcomes did that relationship make possible?
- What are the signs that you trust your next-in-command? How might you build even more trust in this relationship?
- Note three commitments you have made to your senior colleagues and/or to your workforce more broadly. How have you delivered on them? What might you have failed to deliver on and then not articulated that lack of delivery?
- What two changes might you now want to make to the ways in which you build trust?

Trust and responsibility

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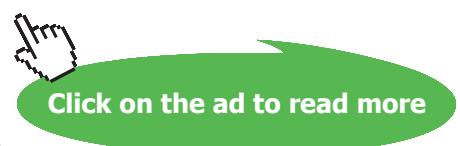
Inés Aréizaga Esteva (Spain), 25 years old
Education: Chemical Engineer

– You have to be proactive and open-minded as a newcomer and make it clear to your colleagues what you are able to cope. The pharmaceutical field is new to me. But busy as they are, most of my colleagues find the time to teach me, and they also trust me. Even though it was a bit hard at first, I can feel over time that I am beginning to be taken seriously and that my contribution is appreciated.

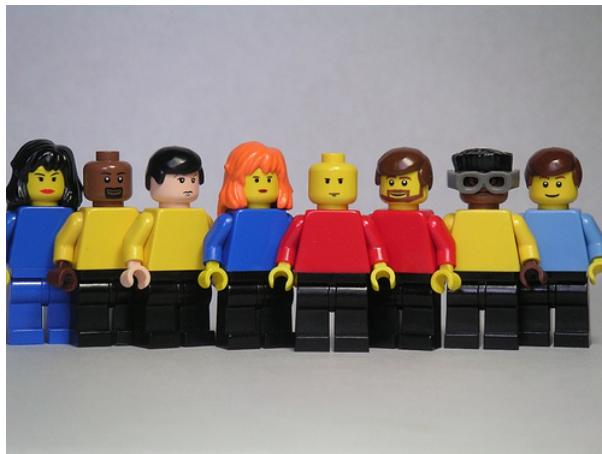


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12 The global village



Chapter 12: Photo by Andrew Bechart via Compfight

12.1 What is 'culture'?

In contexts ranging from multinational corporations to social networking, leaders and their teams interact, communicate and influence others in multiple different cultural settings simultaneously.

Culture goes far beyond national, regional or local differences. While of course it can relate to geographic boundaries, it encompasses literally anything which characterises a particular group: age, gender, cognitive ability, personal style, industrial sector, profession, organisational ethos, faith and observance.... It manifests itself in behaviours, values, attitudes, judgments, decisions and expectations.

12.2 Complex, diverse workforces

With increasing globalisation, workforces are becoming more diverse and more complex, as they embrace employees from a broader and broader range of cultures, who interact within increasingly complex systems. The leader's task is to release his or her workforce's capability in the interests of fulfilling the organisation's agenda.

A leader's capacity to lead a multi-cultural workforce in the broad sense I refer to here is inherent to high-quality leadership.

How insightful are leaders seeking their next career step in terms of recognising this capacity as a key talent for 21st century leadership? It demands self-awareness, the recognition of moments when we – and those around us – are making assumptions about those who are different from us, or missing the value in that difference, or failing to release it as a benefit that will drive an organisation forward.

12.3 The systemic impact of culture

The capacity to lead a multi-cultural workforce also requires a willingness to explore the systemic impact of culture in its widest sense: if working at speed, for example, is a characteristic of an organisational culture, how does that manifest itself in expectations, assessments that leaders make of their people, the quality of outcomes, or the effectiveness of communication? How are people's contributions judged? Is there room for flexibility – and what might be the benefits of that? Does reflection – sometimes referred to as the richest form of learning – have a place?

12.4 Globalised responses

Google, for example – like thousands of other global companies – needs to understand and respect the structured approach of the German as well as the more spontaneous style of the Italian, the individualistic North American as well as the group-orientated Japanese, the 'always-on' Generation Z 18-year-old and the loyalty-driven 55-year-old.

It may be populated by staff from a limited age range (mainly Generation Y) and intellectual capability (a huge proportion of PhDs), but it also needs to speak to an audience of literally all ages and capabilities, worldwide, from youngsters to silver surfers and beyond.

12.5 Leadership qualities for a global culture

Organisations need leaders who can engage their people in building their emotional intelligence (and especially their empathy) and versatility in their communication styles. They need leaders who are self-aware enough to know how to make well-founded judgments, and who can perceive their environments from a systemic viewpoint – i.e. to understand that they operate within a complex and constantly-moving web of relationships, histories and influences.

Leaders without emotional intelligence and a systemic stance risk seeing only a small number of perspectives and thus failing to appreciate the essentials of their environment. That can make the difference between sustainable, well-rooted success and short-lived, superficially-based outcomes.

12.6 Practical pointers

- Make a note of the various cultures that exist in your organisation by reference to ethnicity, age and cognitive ability, starting with your own. Note what you personally take for granted by reference to: the way decisions are made, attitude to authority and time-keeping
- Which aspects of these might vary across the cultures you've identified?
- Note three instances when you have consciously taken the perspective of another person's cultural outlook
- Note three situations in which you have found yourself in conflict at work. What cultural attitudes might have been at play?
- What have you learnt or realised through this exercise?

13 Leading across cultures



Chapter 13: Photo by Wyoming Jackrabbit via Compfight

13.1 Leaders need to be cross-culturally effective

Globalisation is becoming more pervasive in organisational strategies and their implementation, more national cultures are coming together in work contexts, generational characteristics are becoming more and more clearly differentiated, and technology is differentiating skills groups. In this scenario leaders increasingly need to hone their cross-cultural effectiveness.

13.2 The executive's reactions to their own impact

Executives who are surprised at the impact or interpretation of their actions or words may not have taken cultural issues into account. In my experience their reactions to this surprise can range from irritation to curiosity, and from active engagement in cultural education to passive aggression (or even simply aggression), which in turn can lead to conflict, disruption, ruptures in teams and jeopardised client relationships.

13.3 Where cultural differences show up

Geert Hofstede defines culture in his seminal work 'Culture's Consequences' as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'. Global and multinational organisations feature many intersecting cultures: take any slice through an organisation and you will find a multiplicity of groups working alongside each other – reaping rich rewards if they understand, accept and value their differences.

13.4 Self-understanding and self-awareness are key

In order to work effectively with difference, the starting point is to understand and be aware of oneself. That understanding means slowing down enough to become acutely aware – and respectful – of what is going on: the behaviours, the emotions, the interpretations, the assumptions, and the impact of the assumptions. It means taking a holistic view, being curious, and holding back from making judgments of the worth of this or that person, or from jumping to conclusions.

13.5 Cross-cultural clear-sightedness

One of my clients, an extraordinarily bright young woman on a fast track through the talent pool on her trajectory to the top, became aware of how easily (and negatively) she judged those who were less intelligent than her. These reflections displayed a willingness to be humble, to examine her behaviours and thinking, and to learn and to develop that equipped this young woman to design and live a leadership vision for herself which capitalised on difference.

Another senior client in a FTSE100 global company remarked: *"I began to recognise why others aren't quite the same and that what is obvious for me is not necessarily so for them"*. This insight allowed him to acknowledge and respect others from different cultures and with different thinking patterns from him, and to release more of the inherent talent in his team.

13.6 Taking multiple perspectives

We all tend to judge the world from the standpoint of our own position in it – but in order to engage with their reality, leaders need to be able to take multiple perspectives and draw value from each of them.

Leaders who broaden their perspectives in this way tell me that they learn to listen to others more attentively, to accept 'otherness', and to make more of others' strengths. This presence and acceptance, underpinned by awareness of their own cultural assumptions and a greater respect for others' attitudes and values, means that they create sub-cultures of greater trust, more effective communication, healthier relationships and leadership that releases more potential.

13.7 Practical pointers

- Recall three instances when you have been surprised at your impact or at the reaction that your behaviour has elicited. Identify three assumptions that you have been making that might have explained this surprise. To what extent can they be explained by reference to cultural differences?
- How did you express your surprise – and what was the impact of that?
- Recall a situation when you have regarded a cultural difference between yourself and another person in terms of their being in the wrong. Move into another position or another chair and think of two ways in which that difference might be a positive.

14 Diversity

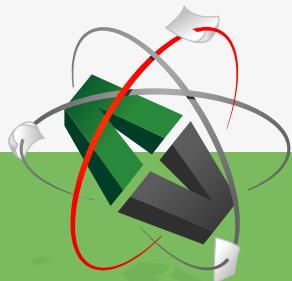


Chapter 14: Photo by Stew Dean via Compfight

14.1 Different types of diversity

All workforces are diverse in multiple ways at the same time. Global and multinational organisations, in particular, feature many intersecting cultures: institutional cultures, national cultures, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability or disability, ethnicity, tech-savviness, personal style and generation (see more at Chapter 15 below or my blog on '[The multi-generational workforce](#)'), to mention just a few of the factors which – if not skilfully handled – can divide a workforce rather than unite it and align it.

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14.2 Self-awareness and acceptance

In order to work effectively with difference, the first two steps for the leader are: first, to understand and be aware of their own thinking, emotional processes and place in their systems, and, second, to adopt a stance of acceptance, humility and celebration of diversity. In an article entitled '[How to travel: my rules](#)' in the Financial Times magazine of 19–20 July 2014, journalist Simon Kuper refers to the fact that through travel 'you come to see your country as just another place, with its own haphazardly arrived-at set of codes that are forever changing, not as the inherently superior place against which all other places must be measured.' The belief that one's own cultural group is somehow innately superior to others – what anthropologists called ethnocentricity – is a potent tripwire for leaders.

14.3 Listening and valuing

When they learn to listen to others more attentively, to accept and celebrate 'otherness', and to make more of others' strengths, their people are likely to feel correspondingly more valued, engaged and motivated. A client of mine, who worked with an Advisory Board that included a number of older people to whom she had paid relatively little attention, uncovered resources of wisdom and creativity when her attitude towards them became more curious and when she began to look for more value in what they offered. That wisdom and creativity moved her organisation to the next level of its development.

14.4 Respecting cultural values

Another client, culturally experienced but finding himself in an unfamiliar national culture, wanted to create a more collaborative ethos within a team whose male members' practice was to devalue and dismiss the contributions of women. They were particularly disparaging about younger women. His willingness to put himself in the shoes of these men, and to step back from his own indignation about how they treated women, helped him to come up with a creative solution that respected everyone's dignity, and avoided offending long-held cultural values, but still capitalised on the competence, experience and expertise of female team members.

14.5 Releasing team potential

This was leadership that released the strengths and potential in my client's team. His approach increased levels of trust and fostered healthier relationships. Its benefits became especially evident at times of pressure and stress, when he reported the team to be more resilient. Part of the challenge for him was to accept that in this culture, and in his team, women were not immediately going to be treated in a way that he considered respectful (which he personally found offensive) – and that if he was to create anything like the change in team effectiveness that he was aiming for, he would have to change his relationship to (and the relationships within) the prevailing culture rather than try to change it from the outside.

14.6 Practical pointers

- Build your awareness of your thinking patterns: dedicate five minutes at the end of every day to reflecting on assumptions you may have made and judgments you have formed without real evidence
- Become your own excuse-finder: when have you excused your own behaviour by reference to your culture or blamed another person's behaviour on their culture (e.g. 'Argentinians always do that kind of thing')?
- When have you explained away how you have behaved by reference to your role (e.g. 'because I'm a Director it's OK for me to...')?
- In the face of cultures different from your own, what could you do or how could you think differently if you were to be more humble?

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15 The multi-generational workforce



Chapter 15: Photo by hjhipster via Compfight

15.1 Diversity of age and intellect

'I think I might be ageist' she told me in her first coaching session. She was a 26 year-old high flyer in the technology sector, trying to work out what kind of leader she wanted to be.

In most organisations baby-boomers (and older) work alongside Generations X and Y. And as the working population ages there's going to be a growing age difference between the oldest and the youngest in any given workforce. In my experience employees are most effective in their working relationships when they're aware of and engage with others' assumptions and world views, and far less effective when they fail to recognise or adapt to others' differences.

15.2 Diversity of pace

One of those differences relates to pace: the pace of thinking, of decision-making, of action. Our world seems to be getting faster and faster, with a parallel expectation that our workforces should act faster and faster. This militates against the reflection time that my coaching clients tell me gives them space to stand back from the rush of their daily lives, gain perspective and insight, and re-focus on what's really important rather than what needs doing next. It also helps them to avoid hurling themselves without thought into the next action.

15.3 Slowing down

Learning & Development colleagues tell me that their young staff – Generations X and Y – like the concept of coaching but resist the idea of slowing down long enough to reflect. The relentless speed at which they function means they have little down-time to understand what the issues really are behind the challenges they face. It's the baby-boomers who tend to be more reflective, and who can find themselves the target of disparaging remarks by their younger colleagues as a result.

15.4 Speed-leadership

We're in danger of getting to a point where speed-leadership rules: leaders who are driven by the need to get results quickly and who ignore the cost to relationships with customers and staff, to engagement, to high-quality strategic thinking and ultimately to profitability.

15.5 Slowing down can mean getting to the heart of challenges

Interestingly, once coaching clients (of whatever age) start to be coached, they value enormously the space they gain to step back and get to the heart of what's being demanded of them. So how can organisations sell the value of slowing down? How can they create the glue that knits together the varying contributions of the various generations and the pace at which they work?

15.6 Leaders play a crucial role in raising awareness of 'slow'

Leaders play a key role in raising awareness of the value of 'slow' and where it fits in creating a culture which values all contributions and recognises diversity of expectations. And coaches may need to re-examine their approaches so that for their younger clients they speed up the beginning of coaching programmes and slow down later.

15.7 Can the coach enter the client's world?

My own experience of coaching young talent – including that 26-year-old – has brought me the feedback that what really matters, and what produces significant coaching results, is whether the coach can enter the client's world rather than how fast they function: whether they can adapt to the apparent need for speed **and** introduce the space and time to enable the client to create new, meaningful options and the depth of awareness that anchors sustainable change.

15.8 Practical pointers

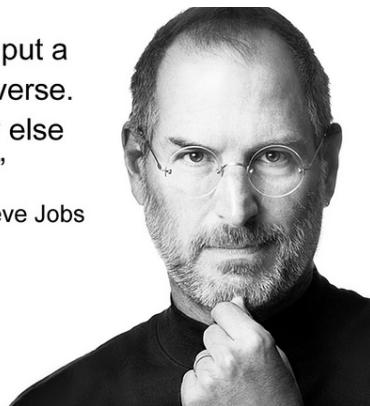
- Identify three instances when a fast outcome has not turned out to be the sustained outcome that you needed it to be
- Identify a fast outcome that you're driving towards at this very moment – and take 15 minutes to write down:
 - What might I be assuming?
 - What haven't I thought of?
 - Whose contribution am I not fully capitalising on?
 - If I wanted this initiative to go wrong, what would I include in it – and how am I now going to avoid that?

16 Career strategy

“We're here to put a dent in the universe.
Otherwise why else even be here?”

~ Steve Jobs

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Chapter 16: Photo by Celestine Chua via Compfight

16.1 Purpose and meaning at work

‘We're here to put a dent in the universe. Otherwise why else even be here?’ Steve Jobs, renowned co-founder, Chairman and CEO of Apple Inc, co-founder and CEO of Pixar Animation Studios, and pioneer in the field of personal computers and consumer electronics, captured the heart of what a sense of purpose means at work and for work.



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In his first [interview](#) as new CEO of Microsoft, and in his [e-mail to all employees](#) on his first day as CEO, Satya Nadella talked of focussing on three areas, one of them being for “every one of us to find more meaning at work”. He continued: “We spend far too much time at work for it not to have deep meaning....”

16.2 Purpose: fundamental to career refocus

In my career development work, the questions of purpose and meaning are what the search for career focus or career re-focus inevitably comes down to: individuals looking for clarity on what they really want to do with their careers invariably arrive at this question in some form or another: ‘What difference and what contribution do I want to make in the world?’ It’s often a difficult question to answer, but only when a leader has nailed what really makes them jump out of bed in the morning, every morning, can they get to grips with where they truly want to take their career.

16.3 Professional identity

Purpose may be the most important – and elusive – factor, but there are other significant factors in a career to consider too. Those of my clients working on career re-focus are often concerned as a first priority to find a label for themselves: they’re searching for a professional identity and for the sense of security and comfort that comes with knowing what that identity is – who they are and how others will identify them. They’re often surprised to learn that the label comes at the end rather than the beginning of their career development coaching: it’s the outcome rather than the input of the process.

16.4 Values, beliefs, drivers, strengths – and obstacles

Besides purpose, the initial input is the discovery and clarification of key factors which include their values (what really matters about their careers and working lives), their beliefs (what they believe to be true about themselves and the world), their drivers (their motivations) and their strengths (both skills and natural talents). It’s also about how they might trip themselves up – what external and internal obstacles might stand in the way of their releasing their true capabilities – and about creating ways to manage those obstacles.

16.5 Career – and retirement – direction

Besides those who don’t know where they want to go, this all applies equally to those who *are* clear about where they want their careers – including their retirement – to go, and who want to direct those careers to maximise their opportunities in their chosen fields. Getting to the heart of their authenticity creates an energy and a drive that sustains and nourishes them.

16.6 Practical pointers

- Identify your five top values for your career – factors that make work worth doing, without which work holds no attraction for you, and which cause you to be indignant when they're absent (Note: 'money' is not a value!)
- Identify your five top drivers or motivations: why work at all?
- Identify your top three natural talents – those things that come naturally to you, and that you take for granted that everybody has
- Have a first attempt at writing down your purpose: the epitaph on your gravestone, the imprint you want to leave behind you, the difference you want to make in the world. Go back and have another go at refining it once a month for the next 6 months

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17 Career refocus: stepping off the treadmill



Chapter 17: Photo by Stuart Conner via Compfight

17.1 Getting off the treadmill

An integrative psychotherapist recently asked me a question which gave me pause for reflection. ‘You work with high achievers,’ he said. ‘I imagine many of them feel like they’re on a treadmill, stressed and under pressure. I wonder if they question what it’s all for. Your work with them means they discover more of who they really are – and yet you say it’s exceptional for any of your clients to choose to make a radical change towards getting off the treadmill. Why do you think that is?’

17.2 Resolving the dilemmas and tensions

The answer to the psychotherapist’s question is, of course, partly answered by the need to earn money and – for many – the desire to earn increasing amounts of money. However, it goes deeper than that, because beyond enabling a comfortable life, money is not a motivator. Rather it represents something meaningful for the individual (commonly security, choice or status).

And if the individual doesn’t understand what money represents for them and doesn’t resolve the source of the dilemmas or tensions or conflicts in their current working environment and they change job, those dilemmas, tensions and conflicts will go with them.

17.3 Feeling ‘a whole person’

What my clients often say when they reach the end of their coaching programmes is that in some way they feel integrated, that they’ve brought together contradictory parts of themselves and that they’ve learnt how to manage their conflicts. They feel more like ‘a whole person’, bringing together insights into their talents, their skills, their values, their passions and their purpose, and where they fit – and applying them so as to release their capabilities.

17.4 Handling difficulties – and refocusing the career

Equipped with that sort of clarity, clients discover options for handling the difficulties differently, for managing the stress and pressure, for building their resilience, and for creating opportunities to bring more of themselves to work. Many of them realise they *are* in the right role but they need to manage it differently. For others the work is explicitly about refocusing their careers: they engage in a process of career development which means they decide it's time for the next career step and which may lead them away from their current roles. Yet surprisingly few decide they want to walk away from the treadmill completely.

17.5 Making decisions in awareness

Whether they're staying or leaving, they all learn how to make decisions and judgments in fuller awareness of who they are, what they need, what they're prepared to sacrifice or tolerate and what they're capable of. Their career decisions get made with that awareness, within a context of well thought-through perspectives rather than being based on emotion, stress, exhaustion or just not seeing broader horizons.

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17.6 A new job – or something different in the current job

I remember working with a pre-hospital doctor who felt demotivated, despairing, trapped in the system and believing she was compelled to become the consultant she didn't want to be. By the end of her coaching programme she had not only become very clear about what she *did* want of her career but she had also designed a way of creating a path towards that destination, beginning with making more of the role she was in.

I recall too the immensely talented sales and marketing executive in a new role with a multinational telecommunications company who, when he came to coaching, felt as though there was no fit for him in his role and was intent on moving on. By the end of the programme he realised that having explored the choices, he was in completely the right role.

They both gained a different perspective on their working identities, and how to manage their career challenges with authenticity and greater balance.

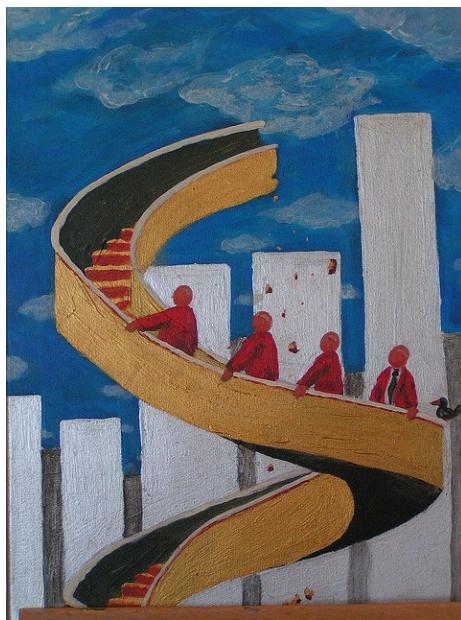
17.7 Swapping organisational life for 'the good life'

So I've found half an answer for the psychotherapist. And I'm still intrigued as to why so few clients decide to swap high-pressure organisational life for an allotment and home-made bread. More food for reflection....

17.8 Practical pointers

- Write down your responses to these questions:
 - What – if anything – gives me a sense of fulfilment (or maybe even joy) in my current role?
 - What is exciting about it?
 - What am I currently sacrificing?
 - What am I currently tolerating?
 - What makes me stay in this role?
 - What change would I like to make if only I dared?

18 Factors in managing the executive career



Chapter 18: Photo by fisserman via Compfight

18.1 Choosing the path rather than the path choosing you

Many executives have careers which are taking them somewhere – but the reverse isn't true: they're not necessarily taking their careers in a direction that they've thought through holistically. Just falling into the next opportunity means the employer isn't getting maximum return on their investment in the individual, the individual is likely to be leading a team that isn't maximally engaged, their working relationships and their relationships to the corporate strategy are depleted (albeit unconsciously), and their career isn't personally fulfilling.

18.2 A holistic approach brings the fullest value

On the other hand, those who have taken their careers in hand in a holistic sense, thinking broadly rather than in terms of the next apparently logical step on the ladder, are more likely to enjoy career longevity and deliver the fullest value for themselves and their organisations.

Executive careers need to be considered in the round, taking account of, and weaving together, the range of factors that influence, and are influenced by, any given career path. Many of us don't know where or how to start exploring what a given opportunity might mean to us, or how to match who we are to the demands and rewards of the next career move.

18.3 The Wittenberg Career Coaching Model®

The Wittenberg Career Coaching Model® can help. It weaves together these factors from a number of perspectives:

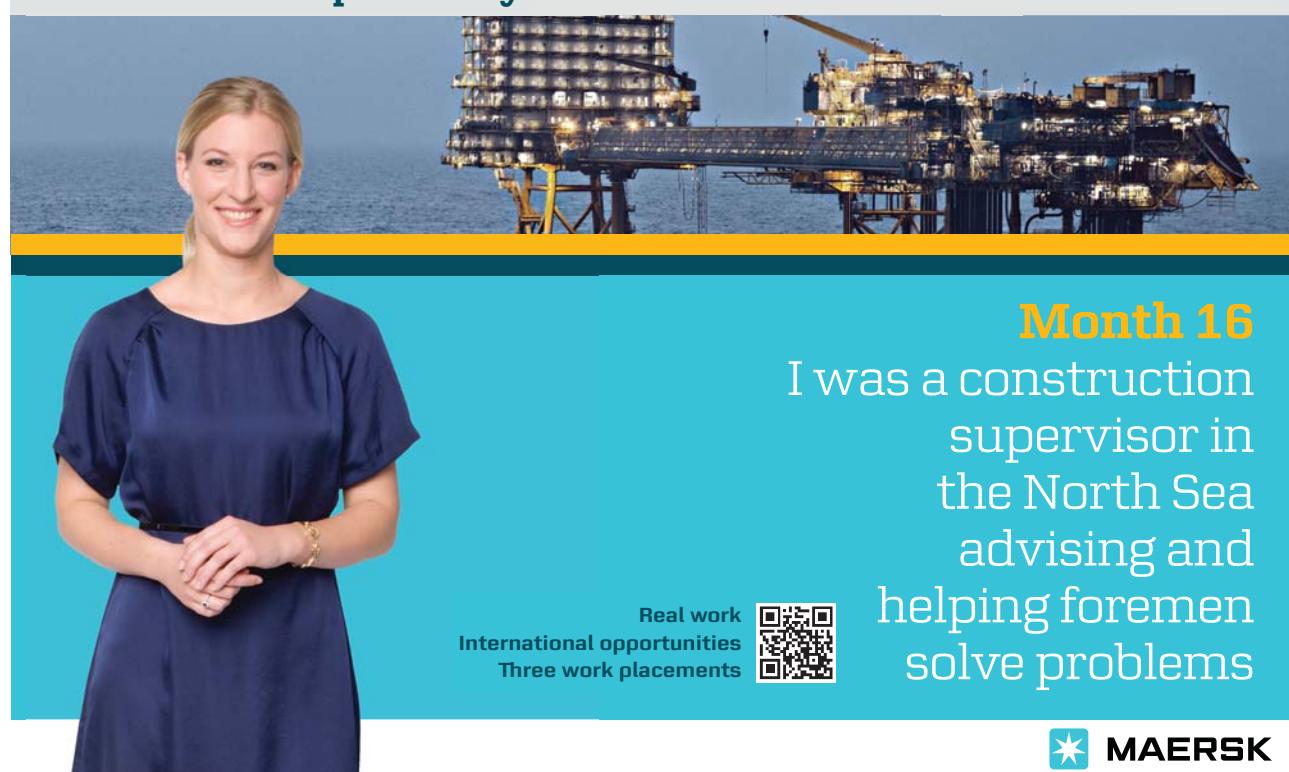
Where has the individual come from? What and who have been the influences on them – and how do those influences manifest themselves in that individual's beliefs and choices (some of which may now be outdated)? Where is their greatest sense of achievement and satisfaction?

Where are they now? In what ways are they being fulfilled and not fulfilled, what's their contribution, how are their needs being met, where do they fit (and commonly where do they not fit?), and how does their work interface with the rest of their lives?

Who are they and where are they going? We look at what drives them, their strengths and how they are being applied, their personality and how others perceive them. Where – when they really dare to contemplate this – do they aspire to go? And critically, what gets in their way?

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18.4 Career practicalities

This reflection needs translating into practicalities: clarity of focus, negotiating the market realities of opportunity, managing personal reputation, and leveraging relationships...maximising the upsides and managing the downsides, and developing resources and resourcefulness.

18.5 The executive experience

A client of mine – a leader in his field – put it this way:

'Lindsay coached me after I had spent 25 very happy and fulfilling years working, growing and developing in a particular sector of industry in which I had achieved my limits and reached the stage where I would have to shrink and downsize, or quit. My absolute priority (obsession?) was to make an informed choice, one I would not somehow live to regret a few years down the line.'

The current impact – six years later – of the coaching programme on my business is significant: the conjunction between what I enjoy doing, what I do better than others and where there's demand on the market allowed me to define a very specific business proposition which differentiates me from the rest of the market. The combination of these now allows me to enjoy working in a lucrative way, in a space that provides me with fulfilment and satisfaction, with a very clear "unique selling proposition", and I am in demand.'

18.6 Practical pointers

- Write down your answers to these questions:
 - What or who has influenced your career decision-making to date – and is it appropriate to continue to work to those influences?
 - What experiences in your life to date (not just your career) have given you the greatest sense of achievement?
 - If you had a way of making anything happen, what aspirations would you have?
 - What do you know about your distinctiveness on the market?
 - What or who has stood in your way in your career to date?

19 Your personal brand: a marketable identity



Chapter 19: Photo by Nina Matthews Photography via Compfight

19.1 What is your personal brand?

Your personal brand conveys what makes you compelling, memorable and interesting. It's about how other people – including your employer or potential employer, your clients and your network – recognise your uniqueness. It's your passport to taking the next well-judged career step because it helps attract that step towards you.

Your personal brand becomes increasingly important the more senior the roles you take on. It's your compass too – a tool to carry with you for the length of your career. Reviewed as you move forward, it will guide you in your decision-making whenever you reach a career turning point: it will remind you of who you are and what you want and need if you're to be fulfilled and successful.

To express your personal brand you need to be able to articulate who you are under these headings, amongst others:

19.2 Your passions

Your passions are the source of the personal energy that invigorates you and inspires others when they're around you, and they're key in nurturing an engaged workforce. Recalling when you've been in flow – what you were doing, who with and in what circumstances – will help pinpoint where your passions lie.

19.3 Your values

Your values underpin everything you do and every service you deliver: they're about what's worth doing and investing time and effort in, what matters and what doesn't, what makes you indignant or engaged. They convey themselves in your behaviours, how you relate to people, your approach to decision-making, and what you give discretionary effort to.

19.4 Your experience and achievements

The accomplishments and experience you've already accumulated – and the learning you've gained from them – add to your credibility and to your bank of wisdom and knowledge, to be transferred and applied to new working environments and your approach to fresh challenges. Packaging them skilfully can make you an attractive prospect.

19.5 Your strengths and skills

Your generalised and specialised expertise, your skills and capabilities – and the added value they offer – and the strengths you've capitalised on (and indeed knowing how to capitalise on your strengths) are critical to conveying your distinctiveness. This is especially the case where your skills extend beyond the technical to the 'softer' skills of knowing how to manage yourself and your emotions, how to manage your relationships and influences, and how to get the most out of others.

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19.6 Your reputation

Ignore your personal PR at your peril: to capitalise on your personal brand, you need to be aware of what others think of you and say about you, as this helps define your market value, for good or for ill. Knowing what people value about you, where they think you stand out, and contexts in which they see you deliver your best work will not only inform you about your reputation, but will also inform those who have an influence on your career progression.

19.7 Your personal vision and your goals

Where are you going, and what compelling results are you going to create? What imprint do you intend to make on your team, your organisation and the wider sector? Whether you want, for example, to create a happier workplace, build an enterprise that offers a unique new product that changes people's lives, or transform the face of healthcare, what specific goals will deliver your personal vision?

19.8 Practical pointers

Write down:

- What you were doing when you were last in flow – when:
 - time was passing without your being aware of it
 - you achieved memorable or outstanding results even if the overall task or project was not seen as outstanding by others
 - the activity was fulfilling, absorbing and energising for you even if very hard work was involved
 - the activity left you feeling personally elated or highly satisfied with the outcome and possibly saddened that the experience was over
- What you are known for: what do others say about you when you're not there?
- What makes you credible: what's your proven expertise and what are your key accomplishments?
- In what respects are you a leader in your field?

20 Creativity and innovation



Chapter 20: Photo by Hunter Desportes via Compfight

“I didn’t know if I should be myself or someone else. It seemed easier to be someone else....”

David Bowie, in the early stages of his career

20.1 The various manifestations of David Bowie

As the [‘David Bowie is’ exhibition](#) at the Victoria and Albert museum in London demonstrated, rather than being someone else, David Bowie discovered many different manifestations of himself over the course of his career: pop artist, visual artist, mime artist, costume creator.... Always hungry for as many different experiences as he could have, he absorbed the learning from them and creatively shaped it into countless different manifestations, revealing himself to be multi-talented.

20.2 Treading a new path: creativity and innovation

I know next to nothing about pop, and I knew nothing about David Bowie before seeing this exhibition. There are aspects of Bowie’s life and work that I find compelling and exciting, and others that I don’t find at all pleasing or attractive. However, what I find engaging about this story is his constant quest for learning and creativity, his versatility and his courage to innovate and take risks, to claim his position ahead of the game (indeed to create the game), to inspire millions – in sum, to go where no-one had been before. There are those who say he is among the most influential pop stars of his generation. He changed lives and pioneered new ways of perceiving the world.

20.3 Collaboration

Interestingly, Bowie's creations are not all entirely autonomous. He has a talent for collaboration and for working with the best people he can find in a whole variety of fields, including choreographers like Lindsay Kemp, photographers like Mick Rock, producers like Brian Eno, and Tony Visconti, and fashion designers like Kansai Yamamoto.

And I'm mindful too of the strength of diversity in collaboration: bring two very different talents together and the outcome can be dazzling. Team-builders and organisational development professionals: take note.

20.4 Leadership, learning and the courage to pioneer

None of the leaders I coach have so far been nearly as flamboyant or as fiercely creative as Bowie. However it occurs to me that in a world of constant change and challenge, a world in which new situations and perspectives arise at a faster rate than ever before, there's a message here for leaders.

The leadership that will take us forward in the most turbulent and fast-changing climate we have ever known, is, likewise, leadership that values learning, creativity and innovation, that reads the market and the system, and that has the courage to pioneer. I'm reminded of marketing thought-leader and visionary [Seth Godin](#), who [talks of innovation](#) as being more critical than ever before – and emphasises that we need to create – and give others – the opportunity to – succeed or fail. The key thing is to learn from the experiences.

20.5 The freak becomes the unifier

By publicly forging his own way, and building massive success by being who he is, Bowie is proof that not only are we free to be whoever and whatever we want to be – but that he *did* – after all – know how to be himself. As actress and model Tilda Swinton said at the opening of the V&A exhibition, the freak became the great unifier. Leaders who are courageous enough to stand up for what they claim as their values can likewise unify, inspire, engage and capitalise on the talent of their people.

20.6 Practical pointers

Note in writing:

- When have you – knowingly or unknowingly – created a new approach or even a new product or service? No example is too small for this exercise
- What was its value to one or more other people?
- What did you do with that creation and how did you apply it in other situations?
- Who did you tell about it?

21 The neuroscience of learning and performance



Chapter 21: Photo by SalFalko via Compfight

21.1 A direct link between learning and performance

'The better you've learnt, the better you perform.' For those of us in the business of enabling learning and development, hearing this from neuroscientist [Dr Geoff Bird](#) of the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Neuroscience (IoPPN), London, and the Institute of Cognitive Science (UCL) at the recent workshop I co-facilitated was both self-evident and thought-provoking. Executive coaching is about enabling the leader's greater effectiveness – and that's the leadership task too. If both the coach and the leader can understand how to optimise others' learning (and their own), they're both en route for better performance.

21.2 Why reflection works as a learning process

Understanding the neurological process helps us here. When neurons repeatedly get activated together, the strength of the connection across the tiny space (or synapse) between them – i.e. the learning – increases. In other words, repetition is key for learning, which explains why reflection as part of the coaching process is so important. Reflection means mentally revisiting a scenario to explore the various perspectives of what happened, examine the outcomes, distil out the learning and how it happened, consider options for next steps, and make plans for how to use it or experiment with it. Each time the brain revisits the scenario, the synapse is strengthened and the learning is reinforced.

Combined with the three-hour rule, the case for reflection becomes even more compelling: learning is reinforced when it is followed by practice and refinement within three hours.

21.3 Slowing down to reflect

Reflection both stretches individuals who value coaching because the pace of their busy lives leaves them little time for thinking, and challenges those who are so used to functioning fast that slowing down to reflect is difficult. If you're interested in speed-leadership and the value of slowing down, see [my article in 'Coaching at Work'](#)

21.4 Why goal-based learning works

Another characteristic of successful learning is a feeling of reward, acceptance and rapport – which implies an absence of threat or stress, whether by failure, by punishment or by exclusion from a group that matters to you. A sense of rapport means quicker results and more creativity, which we see in outstandingly productive teams and individuals. In neuroscience terms this means the neurotransmitter dopamine has been dumped in the brain. Fascinatingly, goal-based learning, where the goals are based on what **really** matters to individuals, is one of the causes of a dopamine dump.

So if you want higher levels of motivation and attention in yourself and others, and more effective learning, find a way to increase the dopamine – perhaps by fostering the kind of collaboration and sense of belonging that are high in trust and rapport.

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We see dopamine at work in executive coaching: the process is free of judgment, and represents an affirming space, where challenge and development are safe. Trust is central to a successful coaching relationship, which of itself enables awareness, learning and development – and hence changes in performance levels.

21.5 Mastery is anathema

In Geoff Bird's view mastery is anathema. We can all think of outstandingly successful Olympic athletes, businesspeople, artists and others who strive relentlessly for improvement – and who seem to succeed because of that very striving towards mastery.

However Geoff tells us that actually achieving mastery means there's less to learn – so there's less opportunity for reward. In other words, it's all about the journey, not the destination. [Dan Pink](#)'s work, which identifies three conditions for motivation as autonomy, mastery and purpose comes to mind here.

21.6 Practical pointers

Make written notes on:

- What you now think may be the reason for my encouraging you to write – rather than merely think – your responses under all the 'Practical pointers' sections in this e-book
- What you believe to be the level of trust and rapport in your team
- Five actions you could take to increase that level of trust and rapport – and three actions you will take
- Identify three motivating learning goals for yourself to achieve in the next two months – and write down the first two steps you're going to take in relation to each of them.

22 Mindfulness: coaching the leader



Chapter 22: Photo by Irmeli Aro via Compfight

22.1 What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness: the awareness of how things actually are that arises when you pay attention – on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally. Research shows that people who complete 8 weeks of mindfulness training workshops and practice (the latter is critical to sustain the workshop learning) report sustained attention, an improved capacity to regulate their emotions and to manage that chatter in the mind that can so inhibit constructive thinking, reduced stress levels and increased levels of resilience and well-being. I can testify to that from personal experience.

22.2 Curiosity

My experience is that regular mindful practice brings me to a calmer, more measured, less cluttered and more creative state of mind in which I'm more aware of choosing what to focus my thinking on. I'm curious about what more I now might notice as a result of my learning with a mindfulness group and following a structured programme with [Michael Chaskalson](#) which encourages me into spending more time on focused mindfulness practice. I'm noticing more than ever how congruent mindfulness is with the Gestalt coaching approach that I enjoy and value – an approach which capitalises on awareness of the present moment – thinking, feeling, behaving, physical sensations, intuition, and relating.

22.3 Non-judging: wisdom and compassion

One of the (many) things that are intriguing me is Michael Chaskalson's discussion of non-judging as contingent on two qualities: wisdom (letting what is the case be the case) and compassion (treating whatever comes in with kindness).

I'm recalling a senior client in an extremely demanding role who, when we first started working together, was on the edge of burnout but was fearful that seeking support, or even asking for sick leave, from her organisation would be detrimental to her career. She was trying hard to deny to herself and to me what a precarious state she was in. As her coaching programme progressed she learnt to be more mindful – to slow down and 'be' with her experience rather than resist it, to face the reality of her own state of health, her doubts about whether and how she was going to be able to cope with the pressures that she knew her role would bring, and to allow herself some self-care. By the end of her coaching programme she was significantly better able to manage the stress of her role, she was able to both contemplate and exercise a degree of self-compassion and as a result she was more productive and effective.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has arguably done more than anyone to popularise mindfulness, talks of mindfulness as enabling you to be who you are – and certainly this leader learnt that rather than being on automatic pilot she was learning to make choices in awareness.

22.4 What next for the leaders I coach?

I'm curious now about other clients' experiences as I focus more on practising and as I build my capacity for mindfulness: in coaching relationships that depend heavily on partnership and rapport, what will *they* pick up from *my* experience, and how will they benefit?

22.5 Practical pointers

- Try out mindfulness for yourself: setting your alarm for three minutes, sit in a straight-backed chair, with your legs uncrossed and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breathing – to the rise and fall of your chest and your abdomen, the air passing up into your nostrils and out over your top lip. When you notice that your mind has wandered, as it almost certainly will, escort it firmly but kindly back to your breathing.
- Do this exercise once a day – and make a note of what you notice about your thinking, your attention and your emotional state following your mindfulness exercise.
- After two weeks, build to five minutes a day for this exercise, and after a further two weeks to ten minutes.
- On a daily basis notice what you're distracted by – thoughts, feelings, physical sensations.

23 Conclusion



Chapter 23: Photo by Nicolas Castillo via Compfight

23.1 Two fundamental principles: learning and self-awareness

Inherent in every chapter in this e-book is an assumption: that the leader who wants to develop the quality of his or her leadership is interested in learning and is curious to open up their perspectives. They're prepared to stretch themselves by engaging with challenges and dedicating some time to their own development. The process is both tough and rewarding, demanding and enriching.

I have also made explicit the value of – and fundamental need for – the leader to have self-awareness if he or she is to lead others effectively, to inspire, to engage and to deliver the best possible results for their organisation.

23.2 Self-leadership

In order to lead others you need to know how to lead yourself: how to develop a clear sense of where you're going, and why. How to work out how to get there by making decisions that are well-founded, being alert to the obstacles, and developing creative approaches. How to ensure you're consistently motivated and inspired by the journey you're creating for yourself and others. How to understand the systems you and others around you are in.

And how to apply these principles to your relationships, to your impact, to the influences on you and to the influences you create.

All of this is about the 'soft stuff'. It's the soft stuff that can make the most significant difference to leading others because leadership is about 'being' before it's about 'doing'.

23.3 Self-coaching

While nothing can deliver the value of personal interaction with a trained and experienced executive coach who will bring insights and perspectives, and who won't let the leader wriggle out of challenges, all of us in the business of leadership can learn to self-coach, to challenge and develop ourselves, and to raise our self-awareness, using some of the key principles of executive coaching:

- Listen – to yourself and others
- Look for opportunities to learn
- Dedicate time to reflect on the learning – and write down your reflections
- Be mindful and aware of what's going on in the present moment

Using the practical pointers at the end of each chapter – and even better, developing a discipline to keep using them and applying them – will nourish your learning, build your self-awareness and inevitably improve the quality of your leadership by improving the quality of your interactions, your influence, your impact and your relationships. You will learn better how to face and accept reality, manage uncertainty, be compassionate towards both yourself and others and be challenging and stretching.

23.4 Become the leader you are

You will be the best leader you can be not by producing a cookie-cutter mould of another leader (which is different from learning from other leaders) but by being authentically yourself. If your intentions are ethical and if they – and you – have integrity, leading authentically is what will inspire, motivate and engage those who follow you, and what will keep you energised, committed and producing sustainable results.

Become the leader you are by being true to yourself and your values, knowing what enables you and what stands in your way, and finding creative ways to get past the obstacles, dilemmas and doubts that will inevitably arise as you pursue your leadership journey.

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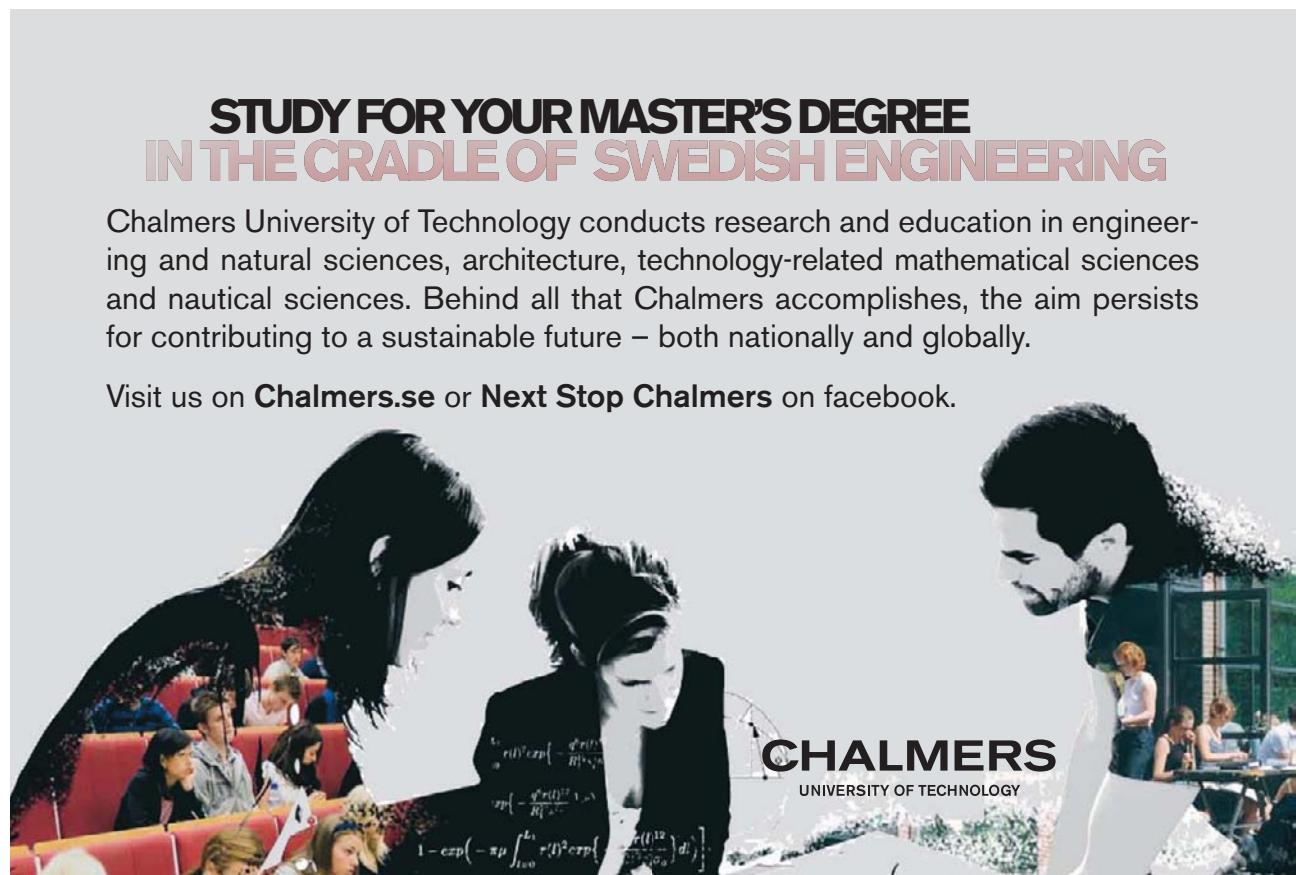
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