

Best leaders take the long view

Outstanding leaders possess a clear focus, exercise discipline and exude passion – and are not tempted to pander to short-term popularity

What is a good leader worth to a business? This has been the subject of hot debate in the context of executive pay and bonuses. Certainly, if recent history is anything to go by, being the leader is an increasingly precarious position as the bosses at RBS, BP, and Tunisia found to their cost.

Peter F. Drucker, sometimes referred to as the father of modern management, best sums up the difference between a good leader and a good manager: “Good managers do things right. Good leaders do the right things.”

Of course leaders can be found at all levels of an organisation not just the top.

Achieving high performance leadership

The essential ingredients are focus, structure, discipline and ownership; focusing on creating a vision, sharing that vision, and helping people to understand their part in achieving it.

This means translating business goals into relevant, everyday objectives for each department, team and individual. By doing so every member of staff will understand what is important to the organisation in terms that relate to his or her job and be able to concentrate upon the right priorities for both

‘business as usual’ and improvement.

Having focus at the senior level is the easy part; the real challenge is driving that down and maintaining its integrity. However, without focus, energy will be lost to conflicting goals, internal friction and fragmented effort.

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You can't lead effectively without structure

Structure sets out how things are done and provides the means by which to do it. This will include transparent processes for operational and project management, defined roles and responsibilities, clear policies, shared data and information systems, agreed ways of working, and standard improvement methodologies.

It will also include provision of the appropriate human and capital resources necessary to achieve the objectives. Leaders

underestimate the importance of structure at their peril.

Discipline is essential to ensure people do the right things right, all of the time

Discipline means people doing what they should be doing, in the way they should be doing it, for themselves. It includes people both adopting values and behaviours that support the objectives and consistently adhering to the structure.

Leaders must demonstrate discipline themselves, otherwise they cannot expect consistency from those they lead.

Leaders must take responsibility but share ownership

Leaders have a self-generated enthusiasm and pride in what they do. Therefore, they need to inspire this passion in others, and ensure that mechanisms are in place to recognise and reinforce positive outcomes for everyone.

Without shared ownership, control becomes more important than consequences and discretionary effort is withheld.

Become a better leader

Because leadership can really only be assessed in retrospect good leaders do not pander to short-term popularity. They have a strong



Create a vision and share it

compass that guides their vision and action to achieve their objectives consistently. Building the support, faith and loyalty of others through clear focus, structure, discipline and ownership of these objectives is how great leaders distinguish themselves.

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