

CHARISMA OR KARMA?

Some recent thinking on what makes great leaders

The leadership industry has grown up over recent years hand in hand with the quest to locate the essence, the “vital spark” that ignites a leader’s capabilities. Perceived wisdom seems to suggest that if we can find it and then distil it, it can be kept in bottles and dispensed to those lucky enough to attend a leadership programme or read an inspirational book. But what is it that separates authentic leadership excellence from mere competence? Can we store it somewhere and then teach people to emulate it?

It was thought for some time that you needed to be a larger than life character to be a truly great leader. You needed to be ruthless and hard hitting with an ego bigger than a planet! It was these people, usually men, who would become the gurus and the thought leaders, adding to their personal fortunes by publishing their gems of apparent wisdom. And we were eager to learn; to be inspired; to try and do it their way. Jim Collins¹ was one of the first to refute this. His extensive research proved that the key ingredient in an organisation becoming great (not just good!) is having a *Level 5 leader*, an executive in whom genuine personal humility blends with intense personal will. This finding was countercultural because we had come to believe that great organisations (not just companies) had big personalities at the helm – Jack Welch, Lee Iacocca, Winston Churchill, Rudy Giuliani.

Collins’ research showed that the truly “good-to-great” companies were consistently led by Level 5 leaders. People with capability at all 5 levels of leadership who at level:

1. have a blend of talent, knowledge, skills and good work habits
2. work effectively with others in a team setting
3. organise people and resources towards the successful completion of predetermined objectives
4. energise commitment and rigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, setting high performance standards

AND

5. **build enduring greatness through an apparently paradoxical combination of personal humility and personal will**

So what characteristics does Collins ascribe to these 2 key elements?

Personal Humility

- ❖ a compelling modesty, shunning public adulation, never boastful
- ❖ calm and determined, relies on standards not charisma to motivate
- ❖ channels ambition into the company not the self; sets up successors
- ❖ looks in the mirror – not out of the window to apportion responsibility for poor results

Professional Will

- ❖ creates superb results
- ❖ shows unwavering resolve to produce long-term results however difficult
- ❖ makes clear the commitment to creating an enduring company
- ❖ looks out of the window – not in the mirror to apportion credit for successes

ChangeMaker International enjoyed researching these thoughts.

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Learn from the Environment

Seek 'Feedback', Networking possibilities and 'Feedforward'

We recently used these questions, and the resulting focus they create, as the "check-list" for personal development in an intensive leadership programme. Small groups were each facilitated by a ChangeMaker coach and each participant was encouraged to take the opportunity for 1:1 coaching with their team tutor. As the pressures of the exercises and team experiences built through the week we could see people moving in and out of normal state, confronting their comfort zones, and trying new behaviours. We now had a way of challenging the course members to be true to themselves, a framework to understand where their focus goes under pressure, and a model to guide changing behaviours to help them to feel what it can be like to be on the top of their leadership game:

"when they act from their deepest values and instincts not just tapping into these fundamental qualities during a crisis, but doing so at any time in a conscious frame of mind."

ThoughtPiece 2 compiled by Andy Neal

References: (Both available from Amazon.co.uk)

Jim Collins¹:

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't

(October 2001) Publisher: Random House Business Books: ISBN: 0712676090

Robert Quinn²

Building the Bridge as You Walk on it: A Guide for Leading Change

(May 2004) Publisher: Pfeiffer Wiley ISBN: 078797112X

And Harvard Business Review July/August 2005

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