

Leading With NLP

Introduction - The Leader's Journey

Two people died in the same week in August 1997. Princess Diana in Paris, and Mother Teresa in Calcutta. Both were seen as leaders throughout the world, yet they could hardly have been more different. Princess Diana was rich, famous, beautiful, controversial and widely travelled. Mother Teresa was an elderly Albanian nun who slept on a hard bed and worked with the poor and sick on the streets of Calcutta. Both touched people's hearts, they were loved and respected as well as being international figures. They were leaders. We 'followed' their movements in the media as we do other famous figures. When they died, people who had never met them, mourned them.

Why?

Because we saw they were like us in a way; they were not perfect icons but real people with human frailties that we could identify with, yet they expressed something of the best in us – something of what we are and could be. And those qualities are everywhere, not only in newspaper headlines. At every level, leaders have the ability to help people, express their hopes and carry their fears. These two people were in the public eye, like many others we regard as leaders - politicians, artists, musicians, and businessmen, but leadership takes in much more than this. Leadership is a way of acting and a way of being that we all can have, it is not something out there, something for other, famous people. I would like this book to demystify leadership bringing it from its high pedestal and making it a natural part of life, business especially needs leadership to be successful.

That we live in times of rapid change is a truism, we have to adapt to the sort of breakneck changes in one lifetime that previously would have taken generations. In the world of business, markets and strategies change fast, we are on a high technology carousel that never seems to slow down. We have more information, but knowledge - information that matters and makes a difference - is as hard as ever to acquire, we take a sieve to the torrent of information that drenches us every day and hope to catch something of value. The carousel spins with bewildering speed and we strive to deal with the present and shape the future but with systems and organisations designed to cope with the past. I see leadership skills as the most important resource we have to develop to deal with these capricious times.

In the past, leaders were the rich, the powerful and the famous. Great kings, warlords, scientists and thinkers, great artists or craftsmen, or giants of commerce. Literature and history hold up them up as examples, and it seems we can only aspire to be pale copies of these characters. There has been a profound democratisation in almost every aspect of human life this century - except leadership. At first sight this seems to make sense, after all we can't all be leaders can we? No. Not if we continue to accept a narrow definition of leadership based on power, high profile and wide authority.

What does leadership mean? A vast number of ideas, enough to fill hundreds of books, all compressed into ten letters. Let us reclaim leadership to its original meaning: taking a path or going on a journey. Leadership is the journey itself, the activity, not the destination. A stimulating and fulfilling journey where planning and preparation are also important and enjoyable in their own right. You are reading your tour guide.

You are interested in leadership otherwise you would not be reading this book. Why learn to be a leader? To be involved in what really matters to you. To be able to do what matters to you. To have companions on your journey. You must be a leader in any area where you want more influence.

How can we pin down leadership, one of the most talked about and written about subjects in business? Is it charisma? Influence? Inspiration? Stewardship? Yes. It may be. Because the reason you set out on your journey, your chosen destination, who you travel with and how you travel, may all vary. That's what is so infuriating and valuable about leadership. There are many roads, many destinations and many ways to travel. Leadership has a paradox at its centre - while greatly prized, you cannot grab it for yourself directly, it is a gift, which can only be given by others. It comes when they recognise you, because being a leader has no meaning without others who choose to travel with you. A leader all alone is like the sound of one hand clapping.

So this book represents a journey in three senses. First it has travellers' tales from leaders on their path. What was it like for them? What did they find? Where are the pitfalls and the dragons on the path? What essential travel equipment do we need? These tales come from all over the world. Secondly, this book is a practical tour guide: for you to prepare in your imagination what you want to do in reality. Thirdly, this book is itself a journey. I have a plan, and a vision of what this book will be about and what it will do. I write this section first; not as an afterthought. I have my map, but the writing has a momentum and direction of its own and right now I do not know exactly what route we will take. I know where we need to arrive, but there are many fascinating sights to see, sounds to hear and places to explore on the way, and we do not know what exactly we shall find in them, and there may be some unscheduled stops on the way.

This is a personal view of leadership. Three areas of leadership stand out for me: self-development, influencing and communication skills, and systemic thinking. You need to be strong and resourceful to make the journey. You need to influence others and inspire them to join you otherwise you are a lone traveller and not a leader. And you need a road map, else strong as you may be, even with many companions, you may get lost down a cul-de-sac or stuck in a swamp.

First, being a leader means developing yourself. As you become a leader, you find resources in yourself you did not know you had. You become more yourself, because a leader's greatest influence comes from who they are, what they do, and the example they set. Secondly, a leader inspires others to join them on the road, so leadership involves communication and influencing skills, others share their journey. Thirdly a leader must

look towards their destination, as well as paying attention to where they have been and where they are. They see further than the immediate situation, they see it in the context of the whole journey. This means they need to understand the system they are part of, to see beyond the obvious, to sense how events connect to deeper patterns, where others may see only isolated happenings. Leadership is a combination of who you are, the skills and talents you have, and your understanding of the situation or the context you are in. While these elements are universal, you will put the pieces together in a way unique to you.

You can use this book in any area of your life where you want the benefits of being a leader. And I will concentrate on business examples because leadership is so important in business and business holds so many opportunities to be a leader. Leadership is no easy 'faddish' package that you can hand out as part of a corporate restructure to solve all your problems. It needs work, developing the ability to respond to challenge as well as dealing with the specific challenges that arise in the course of your business. I want to look at leadership from the inside as well as the outside. What are the most useful ways to think about managing a business at the very end of the twentieth century? What skills are needed? Leadership gives some answers to these questions.

A report published by the Roffey Park Management Institute in 1998, (The Management Agenda) contained the replies of a sample of managers to questions on work issues. Many were critical of senior managers for lacking leadership. At the same time, they said that they themselves were expected to be leaders, yet they had no training on what this involved or how to adjust to this new identity. A leader not only needs a new set of skills, but also a new identity. The shift from manager to leader will happen in name only unless people are given the skills to fulfil this role. How does leading differ from managing? Modern business cannot be run without leadership. The word 'manage' has an interesting history. It is derived from the Italian word 'maneggio' meaning to train a horse. There is a need for leadership in business, and at the same time a vacuum about what this means in practice and how to make the change.

Leadership is part of, and the result of, the great changes in management practice in the last twenty years. It replaces the old 'command and control' model of running an organisation. In most business organisations, particularly in the Western world, we just do not obey orders any more. At least not without a good reason, one we can honestly endorse. 'Command and control', based on a military mentality was appropriate twenty years ago in a different social climate and a stable business environment. Now this stability has gone, a casualty of a frenetic pace of change, new values of self-esteem and individual responsibility, and a business culture that values employability above employment. The command and control way of managing is dead, although like Dracula it flickers into life occasionally in isolated outposts, to drain the vitality from organisations. Organizations have become too complex, and communication too fast.

Leadership is based on purpose, vision, and values, it is not a quality that can be rationed or controlled. Purpose to set the destination, vision to see where you are going, and values to guide you on the way towards a successful and sustainable future. Leaders are needed to guide the organisation, and to develop others as leaders.

When I think of how organisational leadership could be, I think of the flight of a flock of birds. I watched a flock of starlings swoop over the horse chestnut trees close to where I live a few days ago. The birds moved together in beautiful and intricate patterns moving away and then sweeping back, describing a sort of figure of eight, but no pass was quite like any other. How did they do it? There were one or more birds at the front, but they are not issuing orders to the others, telling the others exactly how to move so they all stay together. Starlings don't have compasses and mobile telephones. Yet somehow they not only flew together, but also kept in formation. The leader, if the one at the front was the leader, was different every time they passed over my head. They somehow could adjust in a split second to keep the pattern, but the pattern is never identical from moment to moment. How did they stay together in that marvellous formation like liquid rolling through the air? How do they organise themselves, keeping their individuality and yet being part of a wider, coherent group? There seems to be an intelligence that emerges from the group, it comes from the intelligence of each member, yet larger than that possessed by any individual. Leaders face the organisational challenge of creating the context where that larger intelligence can emerge without diminishing the individuals in any way. The more the individuals use their own intelligence to the full for themselves, the smarter the group becomes - the puzzle and the challenge of how individual and organisational learning work together. So, here is the secret of organizational leadership. How do you develop each person as a leader and get them all to fly in formation?

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