Leadership in uncertain times
By Simon Hollington

Looking at the doom and gloom that the media peddle at us on a daily (or even hourly) basis and the way we could well be talking ourselves into a recession, I have begun to speculate on the role of the leader in such uncertain times. Of course it is not all doom and gloom; it may not be a good time to be in house building but it certainly is a good time to be in energy (despite the difficulties that BP face in Russia and Georgia). But regardless of the sector you are in, all businesses will feel the tremor of the global economic earthquake that seems to be building as I write. Indeed only today the Governor of the Bank of England was forecasting stagnant growth and 5% inflation.

So how can you and I, as a leader, prepare ourselves for the future – whatever that brings? Well the answer is not to get better at what we are currently doing! Of course that is not to say that whatever that is, is necessarily wrong – only we can be the judge of that. However, what works today is not going to work tomorrow – regardless of the sector we are in. Perhaps the greatest challenge we all face is that tomorrow is unknown. Now I suppose to an extent that has always been true – as has the fact that events on the other side of the globe will have an impact on us – but I contend that it’s never been more true. Take the Stock Market. Events in Tokyo, Beijing, and Hong Kong – which happen while we sleep in Europe and North America - can have a significant impact on the LSE by 7.30 in the morning – while many CEO’s are still having coffee and digesting the front page of the FT (which of course is out of date by the time they read it). Yet the CEO’s of FTSE 250 companies are expected to appear on Radio and TV with a coherent response to those events and an understanding of its impact on not just their company (or even their sector) but the economy as a whole. So first and foremost leaders are going to have to be comfortable making decisions and statements without the benefit of knowledge. They are going to have to be capable and comfortable with ambiguity and contradiction. There’s quotation I once saw (though I can’t remember who said it) which goes “if we wait until everything, absolutely everything is in place before we start, we shall never begin” and I think that sums up the future. We will have to be comfortable starting down a road without a clear sense of the map, or even in some cases the destination. We will only have a sense of what is right for us and our companies to guide us.

If that is to occur, we’ll need to be life long learners, and we’ll need to put aside time for reflection. Running faster round the hamster wheel was never very smart, but in the future it will be both stupid and irresponsible. What we need to do is to develop an ability to make sense of events and to reflect on how our learning from those events can have a bearing on tomorrow. Reflection will be the key skill of the day – both as a practice and in the discipline necessary to achieve reflection time. Einstein famously said that “we can’t solve the problem with the same level of thinking that got us there in the first place” so looking forward rather than reacting to events will be one of the principal requirements of all leaders.

More than ever, an ability to flex between different leadership styles, from Pace Setting and Command and Control one day to Visionary and Affiliative the next, combined with an ability to question and listen will mark out those destined for the top. Why? Because without tapping into all the skills, capabilities, talents and ideas of those around us, we’ll have little or no chance of coping with the speed of the world, the demands put upon us, and the rapidly rising expectations of our customers. So we’ll need to surround ourselves with talented people, release their potential, and be comfortable when they prove to be equal or better than us. And – we’ll have to accept when they tackle challenges and opportunities in their way – which won’t necessarily be our way.

To do all of that, we’ll need to be secure in ourselves (comfortable in our own skin if you like) and possess the ability to connect with others – regardless of background, experience, gender and race. We won’t do that unless we really are interested in others. That is not the same as getting people in who add to bottom line value (though that is and always will be important). We have to be genuinely interested in the whole person not just their business results. Why? Because more that ever, even in difficult times, people realise that they have opportunities and are responsible for their careers and lives. Without a genuine connection with those people, our most precious talent and our USP will walk out the door.

So be prepared for turbulent times, for the highs and lows, the aches and pains of leadership, and the roller coaster ride of the future. If we are not prepared for it, we might as well quit now!

Leadership in uncertain times – In this article, Simon Hollington looks at how leaders prepare themselves for the future in time of economic uncertainty.

Tips and Tools on how to coach remotely – With a lot of managers having to cut costs in today’s climate, Karen Frost shares her tips and tools on how to distance coaching over the telephone.

Leadership Styles – Values Based Leadership’s launch their on-line leadership style assessment tool. Find out what it can do for you.

Measuring the effectiveness of Training – In uncertain times companies quite rightly look at all their costs and an early victim can often be the investment made in people. John Frost looks at some of the strategies and processes that you can adopt to counter this so that as a HR Manager you secure your return on investment in training.

Thought Leaders – In this issue of Voice we review 2 books, John Frost reviews The Speed of Trust by Stephen M. R. Covey and Karen Frost reviews Appreciative Coaching – A Positive process for change by Sara L. Orem, Jacqueline Blinkert & Ann L. Clancy.

On the Couch – John Frost answers a Learning and Development Director's question on how to secure his training budgets during today’s economic downturn.

Final Thoughts – Featuring quotes by Lao Tzu and John F. Kennedy
In recent conversations with managers I coach, they tell me that remote working and increases in fuel costs means that they find themselves having to manage large teams geographically disparate to them. Face to face communication is the most ideal, however, using other communication channels such as telephone and video conferencing means these managers need to have a wide range of communication skills. So here are some hints and tips that could help you to manage your people through this period of changing working styles and the ‘credit crunch’!

**Hints and Tips for Managing by Telephone**

**The Telephone – an Everyday Tool**

Develop your process skills to help create a strong relationship. I find it easy to develop trust and rapport through the telephone. People are used to the telephone as a communication channel to develop relationships in their everyday lives. When telephone coaching, as a manager do the same things you would do if you were having a face to face meeting. For example, manage the meeting in the same way by having a set time to talk, have a list of items to discuss, prepare, take actions and follow them through, use email to follow up and provide supporting information before or after the telephone session. As managers we tend to get a bit informal and don’t use our usual meeting skills when on the mobile phone, thus reducing the opportunity these important conversations provide.

**Hands Free**

It is essential to be hands free. Headphones plugged into a digital cordless telephone if on a landline, or a headpiece plugged into a mobile phone eliminates background noise. Hands free also means you can take notes, as you would during a face to face meeting. In coaching terms you then have the exact words your colleague used so there is no confusion. Hands free does not mean in the car, on the motorway, at 70mph! I would really recommend you don’t manage your people by having important conversations whilst in motion. It is bad for the listening skills and it can be very dangerous for you.

**Auditory Skills**

Developing strong auditory skills are important. Using the telephone naturally encourages a focus on the auditory strengths; it enables you to really listen. Although body language can inform, it can also distract. Plenty of reflective questioning and summarising can be most helpful to support active listening. The notes you take because you are hands free supports and enhances your auditory skills.

**People Patterns**

People naturally prefer to take in information in 3 main forms – Visual (seeing), Auditory (hearing) or Kinaesthetic (sensing/feeling). Listening to team members’ language patterns will give you a clear indication of which sense they prefer use to take in information. So if they are predominantly visual they will use language such as ‘your face looks familiar to me’, ‘I see what you mean’. Predominately auditory people say things like ‘Your name rings a bell’, ‘I hear what you say’. And predominately kinaesthetic people say ‘I get a feeling we have met before’, ‘I sense you want to say something’. So, to build rapport, understand their language patterns and reflect back this language in your own questions and statements. When the visual prompts are lost, the spoken word becomes so much more important. Matching language patterns will build rapport and will help create harmony in your working relationships.

**Hear the Body Language**

After a period of conscious attention whilst on the telephone, you can start to hear the other persons body language. When doing media training some years ago, the ‘expert’ training me in radio interview techniques said “gesticulate when you talk, the listener can hear it”; and they can. I can hear when a member of my team is animated, when they have a sip of tea, if they are reading their emails at the same time as talking to me, when they turn their head because they have been distracted. Take note of these prompts. The more I focus on hearing the body language, the more I pick up. This fills the unknown communication gaps for me and gives me lots of information I wouldn’t otherwise have noticed.

**Silence is Golden**

Silences are important. I have had to learn how to manage silence on the telephone. Reflective team members naturally need time and silence to think and then to talk. When telephone coaching you need to recognise ‘reflectors’ quickly because the telephone is a verbal communication instrument. Silence may not be natural to you but it may be very comfortable to your team member. When silence is allowed in this context, it is most effective and it gives them time to think.

So next time you have an important call to make think a little bit more than what you want to say. Apply some of the hints and tips and see what happens.
The credit squeeze - aka “your budget has been cut” is the current reality for many Learning and Development Directors and Managers. In uncertain times companies quite rightly look at all their costs and an early victim can often be the investment made in people. And this is one of the first challenges for the learning and development professionals - ensuring that training is seen in the company as an investment rather than a cost. Like all investments the returns are not necessarily immediate. However, unlike the warnings that are given to you by your financial advisor that the value of your investment could go up or down, if you get the support structure right around training as well as being very sure how you will measure your return on investment, then your investment will provide your company with an on-going and significant return year after year. If you could guarantee your returns on an investment, more than likely you would not hesitate, even in economic hard times. So what are some of the strategies and processes that you can adopt to secure your return on investment in training?

The first is to get a key sponsor at the most senior level of the company and preferably at Board level. Do you have one currently? If not who is the key player that you need to engage? Who will champion learning and development as an investment? If you are already on the Board, have you identified an effective way of measuring ROI that has the support of your colleagues?

Being sure of why you are making the investment is also critical. How does the training support the business strategy and help to deliver the critical few key performance indicators? How will it move you towards the culture that will underpin your business success? What are the “musts” from the investment? For example at Values Based Leadership, we work with a number of companies who have identified that they need to develop their high potential talent pool. For them, leadership is a critical element of their growth and cultural change strategy. Part of the success criteria with one of these clients is the percentage of the high potentials that have been promoted or given more responsibility within 12 months of completing the programme. Currently that figure is 75%.

Identifying what you want to measure in cultural, behavioural and financial terms is important. When you have done this, keep it simple! The four criteria identified in the Kirkpatrick model measure the ROI on training and development programmes as effectively as any model:

**Reaction** – what the reaction is to the training and what the participants think and feel after completing the training? What impact is immediately obvious to others back in the workplace?

**Learning** – what have they learned as a result of taking part in the training and how will they use that learning to be more effective in their role?

**Behavioural Change** – what behaviours have they changed as a result of their learning and what feedback have they had on that behavioural change from their colleagues? This can be measured by using a 360 feedback tool that offers comparative data both before and after a training programme.

**Results** – what results are they getting both financial and people based that can be directly attributed to the training programme?

There is no need to accept that certain training like leadership is too intangible to find a financial ROI. Often we find it is only because those attending the training have not been asked the question. We ask it using our on-line tool for measuring ROI, PerformancePulse®. In one recent example one of the 25 participants on a high potential leadership programme had identified savings to the company of £200,000, a significant ROI on the cost of the programme.

The final factor that I will identify significantly increases the chance of getting a good return on your investment. This is having a structure in place the supports the attendees both before and after the training programme. Specialising in leadership development programmes, we work hard with our customers to ensure that all participants have an excellent pre-brief prior to and a post de-briefing after the programme, with their line manager. By establishing personal and company objectives for the programme up front and by sharing their learning and goals following the programme, the line manager can support the attendees’ on-going development with coaching and mentoring.

A key questions to ask here therefore is how well do your line managers coach and mentor? Do they have the skills to enable great performance improvement and on-going development so that the training programme is the start of the journey and not, as in cases where internal support is poor, the end? Developing a leadership culture based on coaching is critical. If leaders don’t value it as an activity, they won’t do it.

Learning and development professionals may well have a hard time of it for the next 12 months and they will have a better chance of retaining or even increasing budget if they have structures and processes in place which clearly demonstrate ROI. But here’s the thing, and this really is an intangible benefit. If you continue to invest in your people, even in difficult economic times, you are sending out a very powerful message that people really are your most important asset. Actions speak louder than words!
In times of economic turbulence, we need strong leadership! It is a sentiment that appears daily in the media as governments around the world come to terms with the current economic challenges of high energy prices, the fall out from the sub-prime market in the States and (for the UK) the economic knock-on from the housing sector crash. But, I contend, what we need is effective and appropriate leadership, which will not necessarily be seen as strong by everyone.

So what sort of leadership is effective and appropriate? Well it depends upon a number of factors (an answer that won’t please those looking for a formula). Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee in their seminal work “The New Leaders” (published in the States under the title of “Primal Leadership”) identified six leadership styles: Pacesetting; Command & Control; Visionary; Democratic; Affiliative; and Coaching. Each has its strengths and weaknesses but interestingly research shows that Pacesetting and Command & Control have limited success long term. Both are useful to gear up, turn round and face up to a crisis, but long term you will be in danger of losing your most precious resource (your people) if that is your default style. Of course if we shift companies and jobs quickly enough, then we may just get away with it.

However, that doesn’t mean that the others are necessarily appropriate and effective. Use Democratic leadership with an inexperienced team and it is unlikely that you will realise the potential of that team. Use Visionary without the ability to turn words into deeds and your credibility will quickly suffer. Use Affiliative in a bonus motivated and single minded sales team and you’ll be laughed out of court, and use Coaching when clear direction and a firm hand is needed and you’ll be seen as a soft touch.

What matters is choosing the style to suit the occasion and the team, and that means that as leaders, we have to develop the ability to flex our style. The one style leader is a dinosaur and will follow them into oblivion!

VBL has developed an on-line 360 degree survey to measure which of your leadership styles you use most in the workplace. If you would like to learn more, then please call Sinead on 01989 762233 or e-mail her – sinead@valuesbasedleadership.co.uk
Thought Leaders

The Speed of Trust by Stephen M. R. Covey

In this book Stephen M R Covey presents an excellent exploration of trust in both a business and a personal context. His father, Stephen R Covey (The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People) introduced the concept of trust being like a bank account in which you make deposits or withdrawals. This book for me goes further and is more useful by identifying 4 key categories of trust:

- **Integrity** – are your actions and words in line?
- **Intent** – is everything open or do you have hidden agendas?
- **Capability** – are you relevant by having the capabilities and skills to deliver?
- **Results** – what is your track record and do you deliver results?

In making these distinctions he has covered off the emotional and intellectual aspects to trust and taken care of the situational aspects. For example, you may be a person of great integrity and good intent but if you do not deliver results then in this situation at least you may not be trusted. Alternatively, you may be number one in terms of your company’s sales targets but if people are suspicious of your intent or integrity then the results alone will not lead to trust.

The book is an easy read and also contains some useful trust questionnaires which explore the four aspects of trust in more detail. Trust in leadership from a corporate perspective has never been more relevant as the world faces up, perhaps for the first time to some heavy weight questions about the future of the planet and the role that Government's, companies and individuals will play in that future. And now, more than ever, is the time when our leaders need to act and behave in a way that inspires trust in their followers.

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Thought Leaders


This is a book for internal and external coaches and indeed managers with a coaching style of management and leadership.

I selected this book to review because I find myself using Appreciative Inquiry more and more in my coaching and was interested to see how other coaches use the approach as part of their practice. This book is timely; the credit crunch and high levels of uncertainty in the national and international economies means that organisations are making changes to their structures and ways of doing business. Uncertainty can cause confusion so coaching can be an effective support to key individuals going through change.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) helps key individuals to think and behave in a positive way, rather than what can often happen in times of change which is that they focus on the negatives which often leads to a lack of attention and a fall in performance.

This is a very well structured book. If you already know a bit about AI, then you can use the material to dip in and out of. If you are less familiar with AI, then this is a great practical starter because it gives a clear explanation about AI and takes you through how to use the approach effectively in your coaching work. The authors call this approach the Appreciative Coaching Process and they take you step by step through the 4 stage model of AI – Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.

Throughout the book there is an array of useful case studies of coaching sessions with real clients to emphasis how each author has used their Appreciative Coaching Process in their work. These case studies really bring the theory to life.

To finish off, the book offers a very useful glossary of terms to help deepen understanding about AI and has 3 useful coaching forms that would support all aspects of your coaching practice.

Publishers:
I am a Learning and Development Director in a Global Medias Company. The current economic climate is really putting the squeeze on learning and development initiatives as budgets tighten and the emphasis seems to be on cost control in every aspect of the business. Obviously I understand the economic drivers for the business but I also want to maintain our excellent development programmes through this period. My Board is asking me for my thoughts so I would be interested in yours.

Learning and development can be a soft target when there is an economic downturn. Of course there is no doubt that companies need to be financially diligent in difficult times but I would suggest that you take a different slant on it. Only taking into account the bottom line impact of cutting the learning and development budget misses out the impact on people. In this current economic climate the difference from previous downturns is the nature of some of the people affected. Let's take for example the much talked about Generation Y often an important part of a company's potential talent pool. Of the many things that are true about the “Millennials” as they are also called, it is accepted that they are a generation that wants more than money. They want a job where they can continue to learn. They are attracted to the values of the business as much as to the salary on offer. This is as true in times of economic downturn as in ones of economic boom. So the challenge is to maintain their interest by continuing to develop them. You will be better placed to achieve your business objectives if you keep your talent pool interested in the tough times.

Of course it would be wrong to single out this group; the same people philosophy could be applied throughout the organisation. Of course there are also different stakeholders in any business, each with different motivations and it is no easy task meeting the needs of them all. What seems true for all the stakeholders however is that they have an interest in the long term sustainability of the organisation, and a big part of that is attracting, developing and retaining great people. How much does it say about the real values of your company if you can stand out from the crowd and continue to invest in your people in tough times? If people really are your most important asset, well, actions speak louder than words.

Of course training is an investment and like any investment it is important to understand how you will measure the return on that investment. In difficult times your argument needs to win heads as well as hearts. All too often many great development programmes fall victim to cuts because a good return on investment cannot be easily identified. So now more than ever it is important to understand what you want to measure and how you will measure it and then demonstrate clearly how your learning and development programmes support the business strategy and its on-going profitable growth.

Final Thoughts

A leader is best when people barely know that he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worst when they despise him. Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you. But of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aims fulfilled, they will all say, "We did this ourselves."

Lao Tzu

For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state, our success or failure, in whatever office we hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions: First, were we truly men of courage; second, were we truly men of judgment, thirdly, were we truly men of integrity, and finally were we truly men of dedication?

John F Kennedy

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