



Leadership for Tomorrow

By Simon Hollington

Back in June this year, I was invited by Bill McIntosh – the Principal of Carnegie College - to present a master class at the end of August, on “Leadership for Tomorrow” to launch the Carnegie College Festival. Flattered and honoured, I said immediately yes, but an hour before the actual event, I must admit to wondering why I had so readily agreed. As Warren Bennis famously said, “leadership is the most studied and least understood of all the social sciences” yet there I was about to pronounce on it! But there was no turning back and in the event, the presentation seemed very well received.

Before looking at the leadership requirements for tomorrow though, it is worth examining current trends. Firstly people’s expectation is much greater than it once was. No more are talented people grateful to employees. Instead they have come through an educational system that encourages – indeed demands – that they challenge their own and conventional thinking, and they bring that challenging outlook to the workplace. Competition is no longer in the next street or even the next town; it’s on the other side of the world. Technology advances much faster than we can keep pace with, yet to the 30s and below, this is quite normal. The web is their reference point and there’s a fast growing band of managers who run their own business in a virtual world – Labs Online. While this builds experience at one level, they do not have to face the difficult emotional decisions that real world managers do: making people redundant; shifting focus; recruiting; holding appraisal discussions. This means that they can become adept at business decision making, yet inept at dealing with people – the very resource that drives business in the real world. It is perhaps this disconnection with people that encouraged traders to gamble so recklessly in the City without regard to the longer term consequences for themselves, and millions of other people who are now going through the current economic turbulence.

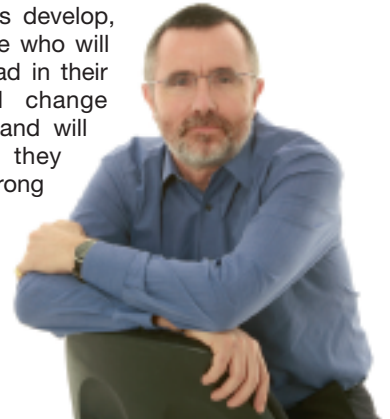
Well so what. What has that to do with leadership for tomorrow? Well for one, if we are not to be swamped by technological advances we need to understand what technology can do for us and our businesses. That is not to say that we have to become technological experts, but we do have to be able to question and listen to those who are. We need to ensure that everyone in the team has a customer focus (even if they are just back room staff – see Tandoori Teamwork), and if we want to fight off competition from the other side of the world, we had better be really sure of our USP. And last, but certainly not least, we need to be very comfortable in surrounding ourselves with talented people who will, at some stage, take over from us. In other words we need to create our own redundancy plan.

Perhaps the three key attributes of leaders are: an ability to think and reflect on the current situation so as to get the learning from it; an ability to make sense of what is happening so that appropriate action can be taken; and an ability to engage people so they take that action. I don’t see the need for those attributes diminishing – indeed I believe that their importance will grow. But there other attributes that I feel will

come more to the fore as well. In the last copy of Voice, when discussing Leadership in Uncertain Times, I suggested that decision making without having all the facts, being a lifelong learner and flexibility in leadership style to suit the situation were key attributes. Add to that the ability to question and listen and you have the basic ingredients.

There is one aspect though still missing for me. I’ve briefly mentioned surrounding ourselves with talented people who will eventually take over from us, but to me that is going to be a vital ingredient in the mix. It sounds easy, it makes sense, but in practice it is much harder than it sounds because of our own ego. Let’s face it, we’ve all done well to get to where we are, have been praised and rewarded for it, and we are now in a leadership role. After all that work, we now have to develop someone to take over from us? Yes – and what we have to do is develop, coach and mentor someone who will add value, and who will lead in their way. Someone who will change something we have done and will improve the business! If they don’t we’ve chosen the wrong successor.

Leadership for Tomorrow is leadership for the unknown – simply continuing to lead in our current manner won’t work.



Inside this edition

Leadership for Tomorrow – Simon Hollington provides feedback from his presentation to Carnegie College in August and also reviews what he covered in his talk entitled “Leadership for Tomorrow”.

Laughology – In this fun and enlightening article, VBL Associate Lynn Davidson takes a look at what happens when businesses take humour seriously.

Tandoori Teamwork – In this article, Simon Hollington visits his local Tandoori restaurant and observes some of the basic principals of teamwork, in action.

Thought Leaders – In this issue of Voice Karen Frost reviews *Becoming An Executive Coachee: Creating Learning Partnerships* by Michael Carroll & Maria Gilbert. She also looks at and reviews 2 websites that offer Leadership feeds.

On the Couch – Simon Hollington answers the question posed by an Operations Directors of a successful business who wants to allay his staff concerns about job losses and also how to keep his staff motivated.

Final Thoughts – Featuring Leadership quotes by John Kenneth Galbraith and Barack Obama.

LAUGHOLOGY – What happens when Businesses take humour seriously? by Lynn Davidson



Laughter is the best medicine, so the saying goes. I've personally always believed this to be true! Don't you always feel better when you feel happy? When you are in the company of people who make you smile? Doesn't smiling and laughter infect and affect your energy in a positive way? Isn't that therefore linked to enjoying what you do and where you do it? So when I was offered the opportunity to associate with a company who took humour into corporate businesses I was keen to find out more.

I met Stephanie Davies, Director and Founder of Laughology, a company who specialise in Cognitive Humour Therapy in 2007. Laughology really is a unique concept and brand name that is flexible enough to work with a wide range of people in a wide range of sectors. A former stand up comedienne who did her university dissertation on the connection between the arts and healthcare, Steph was invited to USA to study "Humour Therapy" with Dr Patch Adams which furthered her interest in the physiological and psychological effects of laughter and humour.

I found Stephanie to be an engaging blend of good business sense and high positive energy, not to mention incredibly amusing and great company. The more we spoke the more fascinated I became in the breadth of work that Laughology did and how the concept of humour could span such a wide range of disciplines with such interesting results. At the time, Laughology's clients ranged from a Heart Unit in Liverpool, and a medical research centre, through to companies in the financial services industry, Education Authorities, Local Government and a Police Constabulary, all of whom had different reasons for utilising the Laughology model and its methodology.

Steph told me that it isn't just Laughology that believes laughter and humour is good business "An online survey by The Times shows that the amount of laughter among colleagues is the latest criterion being used to measure the UK's best companies. "That's because laughter is good for business!" People who laugh more cope better with the stress of daily life; they live longer and are healthier. Laughter is also a great rapport and communication tool. Research into humour has been undertaken in the UK by Dr Wiseman, Professor of Psychology at Hertfordshire University. In addition, Michael Miller MD, Director of the Centre for Preventative Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Centre in Baltimore, states that this is also the case when it comes to protecting against disease. He says; "During the last decade more hospitals in all parts of the world have become convinced of the therapeutic power of laughter and humour. Laughter, along with an active sense of humour, may be considered as a creative healing/psychotherapy technique. Studies show that it

can help protect against heart disease and found that people with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh in a variety of situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease. We don't know yet why laughing protects the heart, but we know that mental stress is associated with impairment of the endothelium, the protective barrier lining our blood vessels. This can cause a series of inflammatory reactions that lead to fat and cholesterol build-up in the coronary arteries and ultimately to a heart attack. "

After meeting with Stephanie I was convinced that I wanted to work with Laughology for my own personal development and enjoyment, the fact that their values as a business very much matched my own value set, also, I really wanted to be involved in this company with such an interesting and wide ranging development based concept in its early stages.

Laughology is very much the brain child of Stephanie Davies so I was flattered to be one of just a handful of associates that she had chosen to help grow the business. A few months later Stephanie ran her first facilitator training session in her offices in Liverpool with a small group of carefully chosen associates. A great mix of experience and personalities from Corporate Development and Coaching through to Acting and Health Care. I can honestly say it was the most unusual Train the Trainer session I have ever done but the probably the most interesting and amusing, a great mix of hard data and creativity, neuro science, anatomy, psychology and the history of humour. For me it was fascinating from a Trainers point of view, to see how all the component parts of Laughology came together and why it was such a diverse and effective model.

In addition I think that with the credit crunch upon us and many companies looking for alternative ways to reward staff and at a time where the wellbeing of key staff is a key priority the Laughology model is a very useful and positive tool which works on promoting self esteem and positivity, and, can deal with subject areas that range from stress and anxiety right through to problem solving and change management.

Companies who adopt the Laughology model have found improvements in staff productivity, moral, health and well-being. It can enhance a work environment in a variety of ways. Stress and anxiety caused by becoming too focussed on a default detracts from our ability to problem solved as we would when we are happy, relaxed and in control.

On a final note I should quote Steph and tell you some facts about laughter:



continued

- ▼ Children laugh up to 300 times a day. Adults on average laugh 17 times
- ▼ Laughter beats stress – it lowers cortisol while increasing endorphins
- ▼ Laughter can lower blood pressure and increase the blood flow around the body by up to 22%
- ▼ Laughter can boost the immune system by up to 40%

The Laughology Mission is: At Laughology we are serious about humour. We want to put something positive back into people's lives, in business in health and in education:

with a unique programme of tried and tested laughter and humour techniques that improve everyone's performance and productivity, health and well being. It's really is difficult to sum up all that Laughology is and does in one article so to find out more you can contact them at www.laughology.co.uk email at info@laughology.co.uk

Lynn Davidson is an Associate working for VBL as a coach. She was trained by Karen Frost – our Director of Coaching and Karen encourages Lynn to use her learning and experience from Laughology and indeed her other qualifications and skills in the coaching work she does for VBL.

Tandoori Teamwork

By Simon Hollington

Forget Manchester United or Chelsea, if you want to see real teamwork in action every day, try your local Tandoori restaurant. My 'local' demonstrates why business leaders and managers can learn as much, if not more, from their local Tandoori than from the highly paid stars of Old Trafford and Stamford Bridge!

So what is it that makes my local so impressive? Well the Rajpoot restaurant in Taunton (www.rajpoottaunton.com) has recently moved location and has now almost doubled in size. In the previous location a table was almost always available. The new, larger location is virtually completely full every Friday and Saturday night and unless you book you are unlikely to get in! This change in fortunes revolves around four elements: the product which is varied and wide ranging; customer service; teamwork; and finally leadership.

In this country, unlike in many others, being a waiter carries no kudos at all, and yet it is a skill and art in itself. Each different group of customers require a different approach by the waiters, who need to be able to assess their customers' requirements. The service is always friendly, attentive but unobtrusive, and efficient. People are greeted and given a welcoming smile on arrival and warmly thanked on departure. There is a long apprenticeship with a great deal of training by 'watching and doing' even though more than 50% of the staff are part timers!

Shazz, the front of house manager, is clearly the leader both in terms of customer service and in setting the tone for the restaurant. Continually and consistently cheerful, he is aware of what is going on despite constantly dealing with customers' bills, and he's certainly not too aloof to 'roll up his sleeves' and help. In fact all the team, individually and collectively, take responsibility for ensuring that every customer has an outstanding experience. Apparently without being told they seek out what needs to be done. When there is a momentary respite, the waiters literally cruise the floor looking for work to be done, glasses and plates to be cleared, or customers who want another drink

or their bill. There is, in a nutshell, significant customer and task awareness amongst all the staff and they all work together to ensure that the service is superb. How many business managers would be able to say that of their staff? But the main attraction to me is the teamwork. There are of course many smaller teams amongst the staff but they can be simplified into two; 'front of house' and the kitchen staff. The latter is a masterly demonstration of production teamwork. Orders come in and the team burst into life. The orders are broken down in a way that old Henry Ford would be proud of! But there are a number of key aspects to that teamwork: lean thinking has certainly reached the Rajpoot, and is practiced to a high level; the orders are taken, written and delivered carefully so that they are exceptionally clear and in a set format; and one of the owners (Shazzhan) alternates between the kitchen and 'front of house' according to where resources are needed. He is the flexible resource that attacks the 'hotspots', which helps explain why they are able to ramp up production during a busy period.

The other area that really impressed me was the communication and co-operation between the two different teams. From the taking of orders, the production of the food, the serving and the clearing up at the end of the evening, teamwork, co-operation and communication between the two teams is to the fore. When Gordon Ramsay goes into failing restaurants, the front of house and kitchen staff are often poles apart. In the Rajpoot, the two are in harmony, each supporting the other.

So what can other businesses learn from the Rajpoot? Firstly, get your product and production system right and ensure it is right every time. Secondly, ensure that everyone recognises that – no matter where they are in the organisation – they are all part of the customer service team. Thirdly, ensure that leadership is vested in everyone and that they all have a responsibility for decision making. But finally, get your teams working together. Ensure that there are no barriers between them and they all recognise that what one does has an impact on the others – positively or negatively. Want to see it all in action? Then look at the examples all around you. It's a great deal cheaper than Old Trafford or Stamford Bridge - and you get a meal as well!

Thought Leaders

Becoming an Executive Coachee: Creating Learning Partnerships

By Michael Carroll & Maria Gilbert and reviewed by Karen Frost

I am a great advocate of Professor Michael Carroll's work. I have had the fortune to attend two of his master classes and a number of his lectures on coaching and mentoring supervision and have learnt a great deal from his approach to learning. In their first book, Michael and Maria focussed on Becoming a Coaching Supervisee and gave us a considered and insightful approach to how coaches prepare themselves for coaching and mentoring supervision. This second book takes a similar approach, but I would argue, takes us into an area that is even more important and powerful than their previous work on supervision.

Executive Coaching is so much better understood in 2008 than it was at the end of the 20th Century when I trained formally as a business coach. HR specialists now understand in an intelligent and informed way how to 'buy-in' executive coaching. They see this form of external coaching as one natural part of their learning and development strategy. However, I still find that I need to create dedicated quality time with new clients – who Michael and Maria refer to as the coachee, the person being coached – to explain the nature of our relationship to make sure the coachee stays 'centre stage', on their agenda and brings to coaching valuable and relevant issues to them. All VBL coaches take time to complete full 'chemistry' meetings free of charge before any formal executive coaching begins. This to us is the most important part of the coaching contract.

By writing this book what Michael and Maria have done is to satisfy two specific needs:

- ▼ A well structured and clear manual for any Executive involved or about to be involved with coaching that gives them the maximum opportunity to be open to learning
- ▼ A template for every qualified Executive Coach to make sure they provide the best possible environment at the beginning of the coaching relationship

The book has three main sections:

- ▼ **Section 1** is designed for executive who may not have experienced any form of coaching and are about to enter their first coaching arrangements. It contains the basics of understanding coaching and being involved in choosing an executive coach as well as contracting and preparing for coaching
- ▼ **Section 2** contains material more applicable and of use to those who have begun their executive coaching and have in place those elements discussed in Section 1
- ▼ **Section 3** is an Appendix which includes a number of exercises and frameworks to help executive coachees as they move forward in their coaching journey

The authors advise the book should be used more as a manual rather than be read from cover to cover and I agree with this advice. There is ample in this book to ensure the activity of executive coaching is successful and to read it a chapter at a time is not the best way to get the most out of it.

Dip in and dip out of the key themes such as the most important part of coaching – the contracting stage; or the way people prefer to learn and the levels of learning; or giving and receiving feedback; or reflective practice; or indeed what to do when the coaching relationship does not work. The final sections of the book have some very practical documents that can be adopted as templates for organisations and executive coaches alike.

I can see that this book will become a well thumbed manual that I will refer to time and time again as a reminder and as a tool, to check best practice. I would also recommend it to any executive considering executive coaching for whatever reason. They will come to coaching well prepared and clear about the arrangement, thus saving time and money.



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Leading Experts on leadership

By Karen Frost

If you would like to receive the most recent articles published on particular websites in real time, then the most effective way to do this is to register for RSS Feeds. RSS, I believe, stands for 'Really Simple Syndication', so once you have decided on a website that is of interest to you where they publish articles, you register for RSS (very simple to do and does not cost anything) and the website feed appears on your internet explorer page. It also alerts you when a new article is published. It is all very simple and takes out the 'leg work' of browsing the internet for up-to-date articles on specific topics.

I have set up a few RSS Feeds to receive alerts for articles on Leadership. The main one I use is Harvard Business. The RSS Feed is:

<http://feeds.harvardbusiness.org/harvardbusiness>

Currently this Feed has a number of leadership articles around Barack Obama as you would expect following the recent US elections. There are also recent articles by Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Michael Watkins and a very interesting article by Vineet Nayar on 'What Leaders can learn from Children'.

The Harvard Business articles, as you will appreciate have a real American flavour.

For more articles that are British based, why not try Management Today. Their feed is at

<http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/rss/news/>

This feed covers a range of articles on all aspects of topical management issues.

On the Couch

With Simon Hollington

I am the Operations Director of a medium sized business that is so far relatively untouched by the current economic woes. Our order book is full and we have some good long term contracts. We are not complacent but will probably have to delay some expansion plans and reel in some expenditure. Despite our good position I sense growing anxiety amongst our staff and I feel that we ought to be doing more to dispel fears and motivate people. Any ideas?

It is good to know that not everybody is in the dire straights that our media would have us believe is endemic. However, the current economic climate is such that it dominates the news and a pervading air of doom and gloom is settling over everyone and everything. It is therefore unsurprising that people are anxious because even if your company is in a good position, we live in uncertain times. Even the 1.5% cut in the BoE Base Rate caused uncertainty and concern! Whatever our sector we have to face the spectres of change and uncertainty, both of which feed on negative emotions. As a business leader, one of your prime responsibilities is to confront anxieties (see Final Thoughts) and even if you are in good shape, ignoring them will simply allow them to fester. So tops tips?



- ▼ First and foremost, you need to lead yourself so that you do not inadvertently pick up any of the anxiety. You will be in the spotlight even more than usual and any sign from you that you are worried about the situation will simply fan the anxiety flames. Ensure that you can flex your personal leadership style to connect effectively with those who are under pressure.
- ▼ Secondly don't under any circumstances tell people that they are wrong to worry. You don't know what other pressures and concerns are at play at home so dismissing their fears as nonsensical will not help! Instead make sure that you communicate regularly about the good state of your company and its future order book. This will provide them with a degree of certainty that will help calm any nerves at work and help at home too.
- ▼ Be as open as possible about any changes that you might have to make, but don't make change for change sake.





continued

- Take the opportunity to review what you do well that has allowed you to be in such a good position, and look at your customer service offering. You have good orders because you provide something that your customers want, but this is certainly not the time to be resting on your laurels. Engage as many of your staff as is feasible so that they have confidence (and are engaged by) the future. Remember that any of your competitors who might be feeling the pinch will be looking to innovate to get their market share back.
- Make sure your personal and your company values are firm and to the fore. Under pressure it is easy to revert to a **“just get the business in”** approach even without

realising it, with staff automatically following the **“I must work harder”** mantra. Working smarter (particularly at the moment) is what is necessary!

- Last but not least, the one thing that will instill confidence is continuing to invest in your USP – your people. So often in the past when times are tough, the instant answer has been to cut training. It’s an easy target but it sends out a message that you don’t value your staff and that the pressure is on. If anything is calculated to increase rather than decrease anxiety – it’s that. So stand out from the crowd in difficult times and really demonstrate that you value your staff.

Latest News

2009 HR Directors Business Summit

Just a reminder, that VBL is attending this summit on the 21st and 22nd of January at the ICC in Birmingham. If you are also attending, please come

and visit us at our stand # 13 in the main exhibition hall. Karen Frost will also be presenting a session aimed at deciding whether to coach or mentor a senior business executive. The session will explore the differences between coaching and mentoring and how do you decide which approach to use for the development of senior executives, so why not come and listen to what she has to say?

Final Thoughts

Nearly 50 years ago, John Kenneth Galbraith summed up leadership as follows:

“All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.”

John Kenneth Galbraith

Two weeks ago in his Presidential acceptance speech in Chicago, Barack Obama said:

“The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy But I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree.”

US President Elect Barack Obama

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