



# Peter Anderton

26 Secrets to  
Becoming the  
Leader Everyone  
Wants to Follow



## Why You Don't Need An MBA To Lead

I know exactly what sets the very greatest leaders far, far above the rest.

But before I reveal all, let's pause the constant quest for something 'new' on leadership and establish two crucial facts without which you are simply wasting your time.

In fact, number 1 it's time to give yourself some credit. You have experienced leadership, both good and bad, throughout your whole life – parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, partners, bosses. They have taught you more than any MBA.



### FACT 1

*you know a lot about leadership already*

So do some digging into your own experiences and see what you can find rather than continually searching elsewhere. If you are near pen and paper that's ideal – but if you are out and about then as soon as you have read this blog, start by ticking the following off on your fingers:

Think of five people who really inspired you. What was it, specifically, about them you found so inspiring?

Using them as your inspiration, choose just one thing you can focus on to inspire others

Now, what about the really bad cases? Hard as it seems, we learn more about leadership from a bad example than a good one, so make sure you repeat the exercise for them, asking yourself what it was,

specifically, about them that left you uninspired and unmotivated. Now flip it and decide on one more thing you can focus on to inspire others.

Finally, think about the other stuff you have learned over the years and pull it all together – what will you absolutely make sure you do or don't do? Why not pull it into your own personal list of leadership do's and don'ts? As you create a list like this, it's easy to see leadership is not a distant, abstract concept. It is practical, and living – it's not about textbooks and research papers, it's not about models and theories, and it's not about rousing speeches and smart strategies. It's about the impact we have in day to day life, at work and in our homes. Impact that makes a difference – for better, or for worse.

Look at your list and choose just one more thing. That's three things you can focus on to become a more inspirational leader. You only need to decide what you want to focus on – and then do something about it.

Which brings us effortlessly onto fact number 2



### FACT 2

*you are not doing everything you already know about leadership*

When it comes to inspiring others, the chances are you are doing some of it all of the time, some of it some of the time and some of it none of the time! What comes next is simple – all you need to do to make a step change as a leader is work on doing what you know all of the time.



Think back on all the lessons you have learned over the years through good leadership – and bad leadership. Notice that most of the changes you would need to make are quite small.

You don't need to make grand gestures. You don't need a personality change. No frontal lobotomies are required. You don't need to change everything you do. A few careful tweaks acted out consistently will have infinitely more impact than a thousand seminars, books and articles that were enjoyed but never implemented.

Yes, there is always more to learn, and that's a good thing, but don't gather it up just to pour it into a leaky bucket. Too many people talk about what they need to do without actually doing anything.

Don't be one of them.

So before you get lost in an endless list of email, stop and think about what you already know – especially those five people who inspired you and the five who did anything but – and make sure you are crystal clear on three actions you can take to make a real difference. Not vague aspirational statements – but specific actions that you will commit to putting in place over the next 14 days.

Then the most important step of all – is to do them! Because that's what sets the very greatest leaders far, far above the rest. At some point, they stopped getting ready – and decided to act.



## It's About The People, Stupid

Leadership has been overcomplicated over the years. I'm not going to say leadership is easy – but one thing I do know – leadership is simple, and it's time we got back to basics. Everything you ever need to know about leadership comes down to one of two rules – both of which have been around for centuries.

To prove my point, we are going to hop into our plutonium-powered De Lorean time and space machine and travel to China in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC to meet the legendary Lao Tzu. And as we split into billions of atoms to journey back let's recognise we are cramming centuries of thinking into a few minutes – so one thing we can be sure of is we'll leave a lot out!

### Ancient wisdom revealed

Lao Tzu penned the good old *“a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”* He also said, *“a leader is best when people barely know he exists when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”*

In the same century, Sun Tzu wrote the *“Art of War”* which is still on the reading list of many top executives today. He wrote, *“The general who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace, whose only thought is to protect his country and do good service for his sovereign, is the jewel of the kingdom.”*

In the 1st Century BC, the Roman consul Cicero believed a leader could ONLY deliver results by recognising they were dependent upon others – and

the total picture was much bigger than themselves. To lead, they HAD to focus on others.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jesus of Nazareth taught *“whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”* His disciples likened the relationship between leaders and followers to a shepherd caring for a flock. Each one agreed leadership was not dominion, but service.

### A Machiavellian mess

Then in the 16th Century, the cunning Italian Niccolò Machiavelli wrote his famous book *“The Prince”*. He believed a leader should maintain power at all costs – by force and deceit if necessary. The leader was the focus – everything was about THEM. Not only that, he believed the leader should appear to be one thing whilst in truth being something else altogether.

And frankly, we are still clearing up his mess. Because although he added brilliant insights into the perils of managing change, Machiavelli locked up rule #1 of leadership and threw away the key.

Leaping into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, we come to Thomas Carlyle's *“Great Man”* theory of leadership. In his view leaders were born, not made. You either had it, or you didn't – and if you did then you would make great things happen. If you didn't – well, tough. You were either a leader or a follower. You were either a manager or a worker.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Frederick Taylor created *‘Scientific Management.’* Forget motivating people



to work harder – just optimise the way their work is done. The ‘right way’ to do a job was developed, and employees no longer had responsibility for the way they worked. OK, his approach improved productivity – when standing at a workstation performing the same task day in and day out – but most jobs today involve anything BUT that.

Scientific management was parked by the 40s, but the massive gap Taylor created between ‘managers’ and ‘workers’ still lingers on like a bad smell. Managers decide how work is done – workers do the work. Managers have all the good ideas – workers put them into practice. Managers know the right way to do it – workers know little – or nothing.

Each of these theories unravelled more and more ancient wisdom – and between them completely turned rule #1 leadership inside out and on its head.

### In search of the secret formula

“Trait theory” made things worse as experts searched for a set of specific characteristics, or traits, that made a leader successful so they could be measured and developed. But this theory lost all credibility when the only statistically significant conclusion it reached was the best leaders were slightly taller and a little more intelligent than average leaders.

As they ran out of steam in their search for the perfect leader, they turned to what leaders DID and the behavioural theory of leadership was born. Surely we could learn to COPY the best leaders to become great? This saw the birth of the ‘Celebrity Chief Exec’ – their autobiographies were used like leadership manuals. They all said something like, “if you want to be a great leader then you need to be – like ME! Think how I think, speak how I speak, behave like me, dress like me. In fact – if you want to be a great leader then what you REALLY need is a frontal lobotomy.”

Professor Richard Jolly from the London Business School calls this “The Heathrow Airport School of Leadership.” Your boss goes away and realises at the airport they have forgotten a book – so they head to the bookshop and end up in the business section clutching the latest chief exec autobiography. They devour it on the plane and come back trying to be exactly like them! And of course, it never worked. So enlightened employees started buying their boss a novel before they went away!

The search for the perfect leader kept shovelling more and more stuff on top of rule #1.

### So what is Rule #1?

Rule #1 is THE most important thing to recognise about leadership. It gives us the starting point for every leader: **Leadership is not about YOU – it's about THEM!** Or to misquote Bill Clinton, “It's about the people, stupid.” EVERYTHING you ever need to know about leadership starts here.

Eleanor Roosevelt put it like this “*A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader, a GREAT leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.*”

Of course, a leader is only a leader when they have followers, so it's tempting to create followers – but the best leaders don't seek to create more followers, they seek to create more leaders. Because the days of the leader as the hero who can save the day, provide all the answers and solve every problem are long gone. The world in which we live is far too complicated for that. If you think it's all about you then believe me, you are never going to inspire anyone for long.

So remember rule number 1– IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU! Or as Bill might say – it's about the people, stupid!



## Why Should Anyone Follow You?

People work for a manager because they have to. After all, they have the job title, the pay cheque, and the power that goes with them. But at that level of commitment they only give the minimum, never their best. Is that why your team work for you?

A leader is different. People follow a leader because they WANT to – because when it comes to following a leader, it's all about choice.

Let's illustrate the idea using John Maxwell's 5 levels of leadership.

Level 1 is when people work for you because you're the boss – and for no other reason. This is where office hours finish at 5:00 pm yet every desk is clear at 4:55 pm for 'goodbyes' and nipping to the loo in work time rather than on the way out! Or five minutes before the end of the shift there is already a queue at the clock machine, each one changed and poised to slide the card through the reader the moment the shift is officially at an end. This is where people give you their minimum, not their best. However...

- At level 2 they follow you because of the relationship you have with them. In short – because they like you.
- At level 3 they follow you because of what you have done for the organisation. They see you as someone who has made things better, someone who delivers.
- At level 4 they follow you because of what you have done for them as an individual. Working with you has meant they have come closer to fulfilling their true potential – you have helped them grow.

- At level 5 they follow you because of who you are and what you represent. They believe in you, trust you and respect you not just for who you are, but for everything you stand for. They can see that you don't just say it – you live it.

Each level represents a significant increase in commitment over the one before. Stepping up from one level to the next is all about choice – but not your choice, theirs. They HAVE to work for you because you are the boss, that's level 1 – but if they CHOOSE to follow you, then you get so much more.

### Level 5 is where the magic happens

Level 5 is where people give you their all. Level 5 is where the magic happens. Level 5 is where the penny drops that leadership isn't a hat we put on when we turn up for work – leadership is about who you are and what you stand for. If you've heard me talk about Rule # 1 of leadership and that sounds like a contradiction, then hang on in there – we'll come to that later!

You are probably at different stages with different people. Over the next couple of weeks think about your team – what level have you reached with each one? And how can you move up a level? Because if you haven't reached level 5, one thing is certain. You are leaving more commitment on the table than you currently have in play. That's energy, passion and resource that you need. Energy, passion and resource that is yours to receive – if they choose to give.

So when your team look at you – what do they see? A leader whose actions and words are completely aligned? A leader they can believe in, not just for who you are, but for everything you stand for?



## The Ultimate Secrets Of Creativity

Do you need your team to come up with more creative ideas? Do you need your team to solve complex problems? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, you need two major ingredients.

The first takes real effort, but the second one is easy.

The first one isn't IQ. It isn't EQ. It isn't depth of experience. It isn't breadth of experience. It isn't qualifications. It isn't even technical competence. It's diversity. Not the *appearance* of diversity – focusing solely on how we appear on the outside – but real diversity, how we appear on the inside. True diversity is diversity of thinking.

You and I live on the same planet as do billions of other people. But we don't all live in the same world. Every one of us sees the world around us differently because we are all looking through the filters of our own experiences – and your set of experiences is unique to you – just as mine is unique to me.

When someone's filters are similar to ours we usually connect without any real effort. When they are different then it does take a little effort – but as long as we recognise what's going on it really doesn't take much.

### The making of a team

When diversity within a team is fully understood – it is the making of a team. You end up with a broad range of inputs, perspectives, insights and experiences fused together to form a powerful whole. This is exactly why one of the worst things a manager can do is to recruit in their own image– surrounding

themselves with “mini-mes” who all see the world in the same way. Although we like people who are like us – at the most basic level that's how it works – we need people who are different to us because they come fully fitted with the very things that we are missing. That's why we need diversity.

### The breaking of a team

When diversity is not really understood the wheels start to come off. Lack of similarity leads to lack of understanding. Lack of understanding leads to lack of trust, lack of trust leads to a lack of connection and before you know it you are pouring precious resource and energy down the drain and the diverse, creative, problem-solving, dream team you put together becomes dysfunctional and everything starts to unravel.

Because when we look at people who are like us we are more likely to see what's right with them rather than what's wrong with them. When we look at people who are different we are more likely to see what's wrong with them rather than what's right with them. That's where we need to take care and make sure our team value their differences – and of course we need to lead by example, so as leaders we have to focus on what's right in others, and then actively encourage the same approach across the team.

So how can you make sure everyone in your team is able to understand how people are different and how they can use their understanding to look for what's right in their colleagues, despite their differences? This would be a good time to come back to the #1 principle of leadership.



There are only two rules that MUST be obeyed in leadership – everything else is just noise – but these two rules are indisputable!

Always remember rule #1, which states loud and clear... It's not about you!

Leaders who focus only on what *they* think, on their own perspective, on their ideas, on their needs and on their ego will never inspire others for long. Leaders who absolutely get rule #1 will be able to do magical things with their teams and for their organisations.

As a leader, make sure your primary focus is on building a diverse team, then understanding their

perspective rather than convincing them of yours, and you will be amazed to see how many things start falling into place as your team excels in both creativity and complex problem solving beyond your wildest dreams.

### **The final ingredient**

Oh – I promised you two major ingredients. What's the second one?

Food!

If you hold a meeting with your team to come up with creative ideas or solve complex problems – make sure you bring food! Trust me – you won't regret it!



## 5 Minutes A Day To Fill Your Team With Rocket Fuel

DON'T save it for when they've gone. Please, tell them now!

A teacher I know left one school to join another and was blown away by the lovely things colleagues said about him once they heard he was leaving. He simply had no idea. Sadly, this is all too common. Psychic powers aren't freely available today yet still we assume others know what we think of them, when most of the time they have no idea.

### **The breakfast of champions**

Ken Blanchard coined one of my favourite phrases "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

Whether you call it feedback or feed-forward, the point is that psychic powers are not a typical team strength! Praise is one of the most powerful motivators in existence – so much so that being praised triggers the release of dopamine, a chemical in our brains that controls feelings of reward and pleasure. As well as making us feel great, dopamine also enables more innovative thinking. And it's free!

Research on this topic is everywhere – surf the web at your leisure, or think back to how you felt when you last received genuine praise for a job well done. And the great thing about appreciation is that it doesn't just feel great to receive it – once you get going, it feels great to give it. When it comes to feedback, what's not to like?

### **Feedback is like fish**

But the effects of dopamine are not long lasting, so praise needs to be continuous, not just quarterly or annually. Jim Harter, chief scientist at performance management consultancy the Gallup Organisation puts it like this: "recognition is a short-term need that has to be satisfied on an ongoing basis" – or to put it in a less academic way "feedback is like fish – it goes off after a week."

That's why Gallup have phrased one of their key questions in the Q12 engagement survey "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

Gallup's ongoing research reveals employees who receive regular praise are more productive, more engaged and more likely to stay with their organisation than those who don't. The results also indicate employees who are praised receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers – and even experience better health.

### **Straight to the bottom line – and the top**

A recent study published in Harvard Business Review revealed a mere 0.1 percent increase in employee engagement at 'Best Buy' added \$100,000 profit per year per store. According to Chester Elton, motivation expert and co-author of "The Carrot Principle" recognition or appreciation were the single biggest factors in employee engagement



throughout this study. He says “The number one driver of engagement is opportunity and well-being” and “The number one driver of opportunity and well-being is recognition and appreciation.” And of course, employees who are fully engaged with their work give so much more to the customer experience and the success of their organisation.

### Do it now

So the key thing with appreciation – is to do it! Don't over complicate it – just have a conversation. Here's how:

- Make sure it's the right time to speak to them
- Talk specifically about what they did
- Explain how you felt as a result
- Thank them sincerely
- Reflect afterwards on their response

For example, “When you stopped what you were doing and listened carefully to my concerns about the project, I left feeling confident you understood exactly where I was coming from. Before our conversation, I was very concerned about the direction you were taking, but since we met, I haven't given it a second thought. Thank you.”

Timing is crucial because if their attention is embroiled in something else and they haven't got time for the conversation, it will have little impact. Don't waste good praise by letting it get lost in the noise. It's like serving an expensive meal to someone who is already full – it doesn't matter how delicious it is, they're already full.

Focus on specific behaviours and actions, so it is 100% clear and genuine – don't get into broad “you're amazing” statements or empty praise that hasn't really been earned as it can come across as flippant and insincere, doing more harm than good. When you focus on what they did rather than who they are, you position the action as something they can repeat rather than merely inferring they are

naturally 'good' at something or not. Some call this 'feed-forward' because it's focused on repeating behaviours in the future, not only reflecting on the past.

By adding your feelings, you 'turbo charge' the feedback and maximise its impact – plus they can't disagree with how you felt, so it really helps get the message through the steel plated armour that so many people wear to deflect positive feedback.

Of course, it is essential to know your teams as individuals, because when it comes to recognition, different things work for different people. You won't always get it right for the individual, so take the time to reflect on their response and what you could do differently next time.

### The ripple effect

In the busy lives we lead, it is almost certain you are not giving enough appreciation – not just at work but at home. And if you ever find yourself thinking you would love to receive more appreciation yourself, then take note of the ripples that appreciation creates around us. The more we give out, the more we receive back (eventually!) If you would like to start receiving more appreciation – start giving it.

So to fill your team with rocket fuel, completely free of charge, simply write their names in a list, then add something you genuinely appreciate about their contribution each week – and tell them. Now book the time in your diary to rewrite that list every week. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Keep repeating. Then do it at home.

Do this consistently and engagement will continue to rise. More than that – on the back of regular positive feedback, when you have the inevitable difficult conversations, you will find that most of them won't turn out to be that difficult after all.



## Why You Need To Watch Out For Fleas

You need a team of self-starters? A team that comes to you with solutions, not problems? A team that takes full ownership of what needs to be done? A team that continues to grow and develop every day?

Then pay attention to fleas at work.

Urban myth or not, it makes you think. And perhaps itch a little as well. Apparently, this is the drill for training fleas:

- Place some fleas inside a glass jar and then seal it with a lid
- Leave them undisturbed for 3 days

That's it! Because when the jar is opened the fleas will not jump out. Nor will they ever jump higher than the level set by the lid – their behaviour is set for the rest of their lives. Even more bizarre is the prediction that when these fleas reproduce, their offspring will automatically follow their example.

You too could have a jar of trained fleas who won't jump higher than the lid – whether the lid is on, or off.

### Who's training fleas?

I'm not suggesting a flea fetish has taken over the nation. Just that when we look around the work-

place there's more flea training going on than is good for us. A lot more.

How often do you find yourself doing the thinking for your team? Providing the answers? Checking their work just in case? Assuming they can't do it without your input? Dishing out advice? Asking them to 'run it by' you before it is presented? Editing things so it reads the way you like it? Telling people how to do things? Pushing your ideas rather than encouraging theirs?

Every time we shift the primary focus onto "me and my ideas", then we are picking up the lid. The longer we push "me and my ideas" the closer the lid comes to the jar. Then if we keep going, we fix the lid firmly onto the top of the jar – and there it stays.

Then when we finally remove the lid and want them to come up with their own solutions, we complain because they won't jump out! We might hear ourselves saying things like "Am I the only one who cares?" or "Can't people just take personal responsibility around here?"

### It could be you

If your team lacks initiative, if there are some in your team who just don't seem to take personal responsibility, who just can't see the bigger picture – make sure you take the time to ask yourself – Why?



Perhaps it was the previous boss – or a succession of previous bosses? That’s obviously the most comfortable and convenient solution. Or perhaps it’s time to stop and look in the mirror – because, I’m sorry to say, it could be you.

When you speak, what is the balance of “me and my ideas” to “them and their ideas?” If the majority of the time you are speaking you are focused on drawing responses and input from the team, then your team will become a team of self-starters. A team that comes to you with solutions, not problems. A team that takes full ownership of what needs to be done. A team that continues to grow and develop every day.

But if the majority of the time you are speaking you are focused on simply getting your ideas and opinions across to the team, then you are only doing one thing. You are training fleas. So don’t complain when that’s exactly what you end up with.

### **Stop solving everyone’s problems**

This is not merely about the stereotypical ‘control freak’ manager. You can train fleas while being wonderfully helpful and supportive. I remember one manager whose last words of any phone call would always be “and if you have any problems at all just call.” So that’s exactly what his team did. They took their brains out and put them on standby. And they called him every time there was a problem. He was an expert flea trainer.

I once worked with the top team in an industrial tyres company and part way through the day a light bulb came on for the sales director. “You mean – one of the most important things we can do is stop solving everyone’s problems for them?” Believe it or not, that was one of the most crucial changes they put in place – and in the following 3 months on-time delivery rose from 65 to 95% in one area whilst overdue orders dropped from 350 to 150 in another. How? They stopped training fleas – and started tapping into their team’s potential.

Don’t get me wrong – there are times as a leader that you need to say “this is how it’s going to be.” There are times as a leader when it’s essential to set a very clear direction and agenda. Nobody is saying that brilliant leaders just sit back and let their teams do whatever they want. But the longer you spend out of “them and their ideas” territory, the longer the lid is in place, and the instant the lid is in place then flea training begins.

Get the lid off before it’s too late.

There are so many lessons from this we could go on for hours – but let’s stick with one question. Are you developing a team who can think for themselves, a team who come to you with solutions, not problems, a team who take full ownership of what needs to be done, a team who continue to grow and develop every day?

Or are you simply training fleas?



## The Ultimate Secret Of Influence

One simple but powerful mind-set will *completely* transform your relationships.

Penny Ferguson once put it to me like this.... Just imagine that for one day you could have everyone you come across at work and at home treat you exactly the way you wish to be treated. How would you have them treat you? With respect? Honestly? With kindness and consideration?

Right – time to wake up and get back to the real world. In the real world can we really make someone treat us with respect? Can we make someone be honest with us? Can we make them treat us kindly and considerately? Nope. Those buttons simply don't exist.

### Where's the remote control?

The harsh reality of life is that people don't come with remote controls. There are no real buttons to press that deliver precisely the outcomes we want. That's not the end of it of course because we can influence the way they treat us.

But how? What's the one thing we can do to influence the way others treat us?

The one thing we can do to ensure we exert maximum influence on the way others treat us is to focus on our *own* behaviour.

Because when we want someone to treat us with

respect, if we want someone to be honest in their dealings with us, if we want someone to show kindness and consideration then we need to be respectful, honest, kind and considerate in our dealings with them. Our list of how we wish to be treated becomes a list of how we need to be in the world to get what we want.

### Focus on what you give...

Of course we need to take into account different preferences and personalities – but the key is to stop focusing on what we are *getting* from other people – and to focus on what we *give!* After all – we simply cannot control what we get from other people, but we have 100% control over what we give.

A friend of mine often tells the story of his first self-help CD. Right at the start, a voice said: "I want you to close your eyes and think of your dream partner." It wasn't long before he had a mental picture of Jennifer Aniston stepping through the door. Next was the question "Now what kind of person do you need to be to attract this partner?" Unfortunately, that wasn't quite what he had in mind as he sat on his sofa in a curry-stained vest with a bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale!

The secret is not to focus our attention on what we get – but on what we give. When you think about it, this is incredibly empowering.



### **... To get what you want!**

Not only that, whilst it's a good thing to know what we want from others, when we focus our attention on what we get, rather than what we give, it actually reduces the chances of getting what we want! Let me explain. When we focus purely on what we get from others, the minute we don't get what we want we blame *them* – and our consequential frustration with them adversely affects the way we behave towards them. The deterioration in our behaviour leads to a decline in their behaviour and before we know it the relationship, and what we get from it, has fallen to the lowest common denominator. By focusing on what we get we are less likely to receive what we want. Yet by focusing on what we give, we are far more liable to receive what we want. It's not about finding the perfect partner, colleague or child – it's about being the partner, colleague or parent who would attract or bring out the best in the relationships we have.

Dave Udy once put it like this “What other people do is what other people do, what we do with it is up to us.”

### **“I've got the power.”**

And when we get used to it, it's an incredibly empowering place to be. Think about the conversation you've been dreading with that 'difficult' team member – how do your feelings change when

instead of focusing on what you expect to get from them in return, you focus on what you are going to give them? Perhaps an opportunity to kick start their career, to develop, or to overcome what has been holding them back? You aren't focused on how they will behave – you simply focus on what you are going to give them. Now you are back in control. You feel better about it – and you are more likely to get what you want in the process! What about a job interview? Instead of worrying about what they think of you, simply focus on giving them a clear idea of who you are and what your key strengths are. You will feel infinitely better about the interview and will perform at your best – giving yourself the best chance of getting the job – or, worst case scenario, saving yourself from stepping into a job that doesn't allow you to use your strengths.

Every time your confidence starts to take a nose-dive, you are probably focusing on what you will get from others, and not focusing your attention on the only thing you can control – what you give.

Try it out for size today – and notice your composure and confidence rise in even the most difficult situations. More than that, notice you are dramatically increasing your success rate for getting the responses you want. It's the ultimate secret of influence.



## Every Leader Needs To Look After Their Shed

When I have too much to do and not enough time to do it over an extended period of time my behaviour starts to shift to 'less than inspirational!' If you are a regular human being, you're probably just the same.

At times like this make sure you look after your shed.

That's not quite as strange as it sounds. Your shed isn't the jumbled mess at the bottom of your garden, it's a short list of the most basic things to practise when times are hard so you can be at your best – and inspire the best in others.

### **S stands for sleep**

For goodness' sake stop thinking you can manage on a few hours sleep a night! Set a reasonable bedtime and stick to it – and don't expect to sleep well if you keep working or watching TV right up to 'lights out.' Allow some downtime beforehand so your mind can slow down before you put your head down. Michael Hyatt has a lot to say about sleep and leadership. He says *"We act like sleep is a luxury or an indulgence; as a result, sacrificing sleep in the name of productivity has become routine. But the opposite is true. Cheating our sleep is like maxing our credit cards. There's a benefit now—at least, it feels like it—but the bill always comes due in the form of decreased health and mental ability. No one would choose to be sick and stupid, but depriving our bodies of sleep is the same thing. Robbing our*

*sleep is robbing our productivity."* Pay attention – and if you are reading this late at night – go to bed!

### **H stands for hydration**

When we are born we are made up of around 90% water – when we get older and eventually die it can be as little as 60%! There's an important message in there somewhere. Get yourself a 2 litre bottle of water and make it your goal to finish it every day – not only will it help you think more clearly, it will reduce stress and anxiety, improve your mood, strengthen your immune system, help you with that mid-afternoon slump and improve the quality of your sleep. That's a whole lot of benefits packed into only 2 litres! In fact, a study conducted only a few years ago at the University of East London revealed that drinking water can lead to a 14% increase in productivity. That's a 14% lift just through putting a glass to your mouth and swallowing every 30 minutes. Why wouldn't you?

### **E stands for exercise**

We all know the stats so let's just start doing it. Start by parking your car at the furthest point in the car park (pack your umbrella) and walking up the stairs. For the advanced exercisers you could do something amazing, like (wait for it) ... take a lunch break and go for a walk. You will feel better, your head will be clearer and your productivity will lift so much that 30 minutes exercise each day won't actually cost you any time at all. In fact, studies into longevity at Tufts University in the US reveal that



exercise features strongly in both of the two biggest predictors you can influence to lead a long life – muscle mass and strength. So in truth you don't have time NOT to exercise. Get out of that seat or you will not only lose through productivity, you'll end up shaving precious years off your life.

### **D stands for diet**

Tricky one for me as I love my food. Doubly so because we have been renovating our house and have just gone 6 weeks without a kitchen! If you're anything like me, this is also the one that slips first

when the pressure's on, or you're out on the road. But you know, and I know, that getting your 5-a-day, avoiding fast food and making sensible choices is all it takes. After all, we are what we eat.

So the pressure's on. You have a lot to do. At times like this, you simply cannot afford to let these things slip. So let's keep it simple. If the chips are down and you need to be at your best – make sure you look after your shed!



## Five Strategies You Can Use Right Now To Improve Your Relationship With Your Team

As human beings, we all need to feel significant, interesting, and that our contributions matter. Acknowledge this simple fact in your day-to-day interactions with colleagues and watch them transform into happier, more productive, and more effective professionals.

Think about a positive relationship with an important person in your life. What makes this relationship strong? What does it take to keep things running along smoothly? Now imagine what would happen if you suddenly decided to ignore the other person. You're not being hostile to them or annoying them on purpose; you're simply not paying attention. What do you think would be the result? Of course, the relationship would eventually fall apart. No one likes to be ignored. Not your spouse, friend, or family member, and certainly not your colleagues! For relationships to work, social or professional, it's important that both people invest – by showing an interest in each other.

### The One-Sided Relationship

Have you ever been in a one-sided relationship? In most relationships, there's one person who gives slightly more, and there's another who takes slightly more. But typically, both people in the relationship are giving and taking to a similar degree. Otherwise, the relationship wouldn't work as the giver would finally just "give" up! Let's use a food analogy. Imagine you have a friend over to watch a big match, and you decide to order a pizza. If your relationship with your friend is a healthy one, then

here's what would probably happen: the pizza arrives and you sit down to eat. Depending on who's hungrier, one of you might eat one or two slices more than the other. At the end of the day, though, you're both full and satisfied.

Now consider what might happen if you're in a one-sided relationship. The same scenario might end up looking more like this: you have a friend over and decide you're hungry, so you order a pizza. You don't ask if he wants to; you just do it. The pizza comes, and you eat the whole thing by yourself, completely ignoring your friend. How many times could you do it before they simply go elsewhere?

That's an extreme example, but you get the idea. For both people in a relationship to be satisfied enough to make it work, there has to be both 'give and take.' We all know this is true in our personal relationships, but many of us go about our professional lives without applying this simple principle. Think about how much you give as a leader. And I'm not talking about how much work you do for the organisation – that's a different issue altogether. I'm talking about how much you put into relationships with your colleagues and team members. You see, if you're like most managers, you have no problem taking in your professional relationships. And your team is probably pretty good at giving. They may like you; they may fear you, but I promise you they are paying you attention. They're the natural givers in the relationship. Are you giving back, or are you keeping the whole pizza to yourself?



## ROI: Return on Interest

It's clear why we need to pay attention to our personal relationships. We want to keep our family and friends because (hopefully!) we genuinely love them and like to be around them. But at work, it's different. I mean, you're not there to make friends, right? Says who? There are real advantages to paying attention to your team members in much the same way you would show interest in a personal relationship. Not only does it make the work environment a lot more positive, but it will also make your team much more productive and efficient. When you pay attention to your employees, they feel valued, and this value is transferred into their work. Instead of begrudgingly getting through their day, they begin to feel inspired to go beyond mediocre work to produce excellent results!

Why is there such a huge return on interest? There's a certain psychology to this. Most healthy people have a genuine desire for symbiotic relationships. They want to give and take. So, when your team members see that you are putting effort into the relationship, they will naturally want to give even more. You'd be surprised how far a casual compliment on a team member's recent presentation can go towards making her next project even better!

## Five Ways to Demonstrate Interest

Now that we've discussed how important it is to show interest in your colleagues, let's talk about some simple ways to put this philosophy into practice.

### 1. Get to know your colleagues:

Ask about their families. Communicate your interest in them as a person, not just as a source of completed work.

### 2. Give unexpected praise:

Go out of your way to praise team members for

their accomplishments. Positive reinforcement trumps negative every time.

### 3. Celebrate as a team:

Don't take all the credit. When your team accomplishes something great, go out of your way to emphasise their contribution – as a team and individually. Don't hog the pizza!

### 4. Defend them:

When your team succeeds, you don't get to take the credit. When your team fails, you must take all the responsibility. That's just part of being a leader.

### 5. Be genuine:

People know when you're just using some checklist you found in a leadership blog. So make an effort actually to be interested in improving relationships, and the rest will follow.

I remember meeting the MD of a company at a networking event. He had a compelling message and spoke eloquently about his company and their offering. It was even something I needed. The only problem? He wasn't the slightest bit interested in me, and no matter how hard I tried everything was expertly steered back to him and his company. He made an impression, no doubt about it. Even now – I have forgotten every other company I came across that day but will never forget the name of his company. And I made a mental note never to do business with them, ever.

Dale Carnegie once put it like this “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” It's so true – yet too many of us follow the mistake in Bette Midler's classic line from the film ‘Beaches’ – “But enough about me, let's talk about you... what do YOU think of me?”



## Why Perfection Is A Losing Battle

Before you read any further, get up and close the door. At the very least, keep this under wraps. Now lean in close and listen carefully. What I'm about to tell you is a top-secret announcement that no manager or leader has ever thought of before:

### We Don't Have To Be Perfect!

That's right, I'm shouting. You need to hear this. And more than just hear this, you need to incorporate this idea into your thinking process and let it affect your everyday actions. Doing so can bring you more success than you ever thought possible.

Exactly how can it bring you more success? I'm glad you asked.

### Don't get bogged down

Too many managers and leaders get weighed down by some form of the thought, "Whatever I do has to be perfect. If it's not perfect, I shouldn't attempt it at all." While it is important to do things well, giving too much of your energy to making things perfect can keep you from taking action altogether.

Instead of making moves to get things done, we become experts at making moves to get things ready. We get so wrapped up in trying to ensure that everything will be perfect, we fail to move forward. We get bogged down in the minutiae and become consumed with trying to make each and every detail just right.

Imagine yourself stuck in the wilderness with noth-

ing but your wits and your own two feet. You know there's a village about three miles due west, and you can follow the setting sun in that direction. Are you going to spend the next two hours planning the perfect route and scheduling your rest breaks? Or are you going to start walking and let the rest take care of itself?

Think about that for a moment. Start walking straight away, and two hours later you'll be in the village enjoying the generosity of the locals. Start planning and scheduling, and two hours later you'll still be in the same place.

It really doesn't matter that you take the optimal route or that you get enough rest along the way. What is important is that you get where you need to go.

### Just do it!

I'm not saying that all planning should be done away with. On the contrary, planning is essential. But when you know what needs to be done and how you're going to do it, go ahead and do it.

Yes, this unplanned, unscheduled approach isn't perfect. But you know what? It doesn't have to be. And while getting started without much planning may seem like random action with no thought whatsoever, it's really very much more than that.

Because when you know the basics—where you're going and how you're going to get there, you can



do 'just enough' thinking followed by 'just enough' action. This leads to 'just enough' results which deliver a lot more than the perfect plan that was never implemented.

### **Carpe momentum**

The Latin phrase *carpe diem*—seize the day—is an important one for any manager who is trying to get things done. But perhaps more important is a lesser known Latin phrase that really zeroes in on the importance of taking action: *carpe momentum*. Seize the moment.

*Carpe momentum* capsulizes the idea that there's no time like the present moment to get moving. There are more moments in a day than there are days in your life. Each and every one of those moments can be seized. Each and every one of those moments can be a beginning that takes your project one step closer to completion.

So don't wait for the perfect moment. And don't waste all your moments trying to work out a way to make all the other moments perfect. Seize the moment you've got, then go and do something with it.

### **The moment is now**

Put perfection out of your mind. It's a losing battle after all. Don't expect perfection from yourself.

Don't expect perfection from your employees. And don't expect perfection from your plans and the results they yield.

Avoid becoming an expert at 'getting ready.' Instead, become an expert at getting things done. When you know the direction you need to go, start walking. Don't plan and fret over the best possible route, just go. You can always change course later on.

Start with 'just enough' thinking followed by 'just enough' action. Get 'just enough' results and then, if necessary, build on those results until they're somewhere between 'enough' and 'great.' But remember, don't strive for perfection because you'll never reach it.

Cross out *carpe diem* on your list of motivational phrases and replace it with *carpe momentum*. Then use each and every moment of your day to take action—not perfect action, mind you, just action.

Alright, lean in close again and listen carefully. What I'm about to tell you is another top-secret announcement that no manager or leader has ever thought of before:

### **The moment is now!**

Get going.



## Knowledge Is Power!

How well do you know your team? It's a simple question that often elicits a very complicated answer. It might start with a pause, proceed to an "Uuuuum" or two, before culminating in some form of, "I guess I don't really know them very well at all."

Too many leaders only know the absolute basics about their team members. Too few leaders really know their people. Too few leaders know what makes their people tick. Too few leaders know what made their people who they are today.

### **Know your people**

Knowledge is power when it comes to building an effective team. At its most basic, a team is like a family. Family members know a lot about each other, and this draws them closer together. They know the other's likes and dislikes. They know the other's strengths and weaknesses. They know the events that made the others what they are today.

All of that knowledge serves to help them get along. It helps them work together to achieve the most important job of all: creating success. Because we want more than just survival from our team. We want performance. We want excellence. We can have both by getting to know each other.

### **The "know-your-people" challenge**

Whether your team is well-established or brand spanking new, the following activity works to help

you get to know the people with whom you work... and help them get to know you as well.

Gather your team together and explain that everyone gets five to ten minutes to walk through their own story from birth to the present day. They'll all need to pick out key points and challenges in their life that made them who they are today.

Then, start with yourself. Tell them where you were born. Tell them where you grew up and went to school. Tell them what you enjoyed when you were young – and what some of your greatest challenges were. Tell them what's made you who you are and what brought you to your current position. Tell them what drives you and what makes you tick. Tell them what you like to do with your free time today. Tell them what your greatest challenges are right now.

When you are finished, call on someone to go second. Ask someone ahead of time (who understands exactly what you are trying to do) to be ready to go second so you can get the ball rolling in the right direction. If you set the right example, and the second person follows suit, then the rest of the team will follow.

### **Ask for strengths and weaknesses**

In the course of your turn, be sure to tell your team what your strengths and weaknesses are. If they



don't offer their strengths and weaknesses during their turn, take a moment to ask them.

This is important because, when we work as a team, we see those strengths and weaknesses first hand. When one employee is weak in a particular skill, the other employees have to compensate. And the thing is, those other employees know that they have to pick up the slack. If one employee is always weak in a particular area, the other employees may become irritated that they are always doing what the one employee didn't (or couldn't.)

Revealing each person's strengths and weaknesses accomplishes two things:

1. It lets everyone know that the person doing the talking is aware of his own abilities and is working to manage them.
2. It helps everyone see how their strengths can compensate for other's weaknesses.

That way, when employee A is faced with performing something at which he is weak, the other

employees know 1) that he's not doing a less than stellar job on purpose, and 2) that they should be ready to give him a hand.

You'll be amazed by the value of what you can learn from the "know-your-team" challenge. You'll also be surprised by the impact it has on the cohesion, engagement, and performance of your team.

### **Scio te ipsum**

Physicians are guided by the Latin phrase 'temet nosce' —know thyself. While this is good advice for all professions, a more useful phrase for managers and leaders might be 'scio te ipsum' — know your team.

When you know your team, you'll be able to use each member to the best of their ability. When your team knows each other, they'll work together and perform better. When your team knows you, they'll be more apt to see you as a person and not just their boss. Put that all together, and you've got a potent recipe for success.



## You Really Don't Need Richard Branson To Tell You This

Although Richard Branson frequently points to listening as an entirely critical factor in the success of Virgin, you really don't need Richard Branson to tell you that listening is crucial. Simply look back over the managers you've worked with over the years and split them into two columns. In the right column write the names of those who really listened to you, made sure they were interested in what you had to say and gave you a chance to say it, and in the left column put everyone else. Spot the pattern? I guarantee that the best managers, the ones who really inspired you, will all be in the right-hand column.

### Shut up and listen so they can open up and deliver

When it comes to leaders, how well they listen sorts the wheat from the chaff. Why? Because leaders who really listen get the most important principle of leadership – they understand that it's not about them! They have the wisdom to shut up and listen so their teams can open up and deliver.

Let's face it; nobody's perfect. I've messed this one up in the past. One of my strengths is ideas and creativity. I can remember one team in particular where we made massive strides forward in safety and quality in only a few months. It was dramatic. But we didn't sustain it – because it was all based on my ideas and my perspective. I had an opinion, and I was vocal about it. I gave clear direction. I made decisions. I convinced others it was the right way to go, and in truth, they were good ideas. We made real progress, but they were my ideas, not theirs – and so they didn't last.

Okay – let's be fair, listening isn't all there is to do with leadership. It's not the silver bullet that solves

all leadership dilemmas. But it's close – and when it comes to leadership, it's the best place to start.

Many people have written lots about listening skills. I'm not at all convinced they are barking up the right tree. Personally, I think that describing listening as a skill is something of a cop-out because I believe listening isn't a skill – it's a choice.

### Listening is a choice

When you are communicating with someone, the key question is: **where is the focus of your attention?** Is it upon you and your ideas or is it upon them and their ideas? Are you listening with the intent to understand what they are saying, or are you simply 'listening' with the intent to be able to reply?

If you have the single most important principle of leadership embedded in your thinking, then the focus of your attention is upon them because you know that right then it's not about you! If the focus of your attention is upon them then YOU ARE TRULY LISTENING! Not queuing to get in, not working out what you are going to say next, not thinking about what you need to get done before you go home, and certainly not trying to type your next email hoping you can deal with both things quickly and get on with your day.

Listening is a choice. The most important choice a leader will ever make. So have you chosen to listen – or not?

Now if you really want to get the best out of your team, get out there – and give your team a *really* good listening to!



## Are You Surrounded By Idiots?

Assumptions save a lot of time – but the wrong assumptions can lead to disaster. So let me ask you a question – where are your assumptions taking you?

We make assumptions remarkably fast. In a matter of a second or less, you can see something and assume you know what it is and what its characteristics will be. And that's not a bad thing. In fact, it's an incredibly beneficial thing when you get right down to it. The world would be a very different place if we didn't see a flame and assume right away that it was hot and that it could hurt us. We'd have to spend all our time identifying that, yes, it is indeed a flame and that, yes, it is hot and will burn us if we touch it. We'd have to do that EVERY TIME we saw a flame. Now expand that notion to all your daily activities—getting out of bed, traversing stairs, taking care of ourselves, cooking food. Without assumptions, we would basically be in an infantile state and have to re-learn how to live every day of our life.

At their most technical, assumptions are a form of pattern recognition that help our brain process and filter the minutiae of life that would otherwise bog us down in the hows and whys of it all. So, at a basic level, assumptions are there to help us get through life quicker. Again, that's a good thing.

Unfortunately, humans have a tendency to take the brain's natural abilities and turn them from good to bad in the mere blink of an eye. Case in point: mak-

ing assumptions about people. It's scary enough that humans can assume something faster than you can say, "To assume makes an ass out of you and me." But what's really alarming is the impact those assumptions can have on the people around you.

As a leader, this notion of assumptions is of particular importance because it can affect how your team meshes, engages and works together. Ultimately, it can affect their performance—be it individually or collectively—and even their happiness.

### **What you assume often comes to be**

Think about your team for a moment. What assumptions have you made about the team as a whole or about individual members? Some of those assumptions may be good, and some may be bad. The thing is, nine times out of ten, people will behave according to the assumptions we make about them.

If we assume that our teams—or specific members thereof—need constant instruction, direction, and guidance, that's exactly how they will behave. In essence, our assumptions and the way we manifest them towards our employees shapes their behaviour. What you assume often comes to be.

### **The trick**

Granted, life is too short NOT to make assumptions. If we didn't make assumptions, we wouldn't make



it out of bed in the morning, let alone out of the house. The day would be filled with the relentless grind of figuring out even the simplest task again and again.

But let's assume we could make assumptions about things but didn't make assumptions about people. Though we could make it out of bed and out of the house every day, we would still have to spend an exorbitant amount of time figuring each other out. This is as much a bad thing as making negative assumptions about people.

The trick is to make assumptions that bring out the best in our employees rather than assumptions that bring out the worst. If we assume that our team wants to do a great job, our behaviour towards them will create the conditions necessary for them to do just that.

This trick applies not just to teams as a whole, but to team members individually. We can assume good things, or we can assume bad things about an employee. Either way, what we assume often comes to be.

Wouldn't it be better to make positive assumptions and bring out the best in your employees? Yes, we may occasionally be disappointed when someone—or a number of someones—takes advantage of our good assumptions. But remember this one thing: the environment we create by assuming our team WANTS to do a great job will deliver many, many times more benefits than we could ever lose when the tiny minority who really don't care, take the mickey. Boil that down to its basic properties and you'll see that the odds are in our favour to make good assumptions rather than bad assumptions... even if we may get burned once in a while.

### **Assume they're stars – and they will be**

We are all stars in something. The take-away from all this is that, as leaders, we get the best results by assuming our team members are stars. By assuming that, they want to do a good job. By assuming, they are trustworthy. By assuming, they are full of great ideas. And by assuming they want to excel.

So take care what you assume. Always look for the good, because if you assume you are surrounded by idiots, you will be.



## Put The 'No' In Innovation

What's the most difficult word to say in the English language? Is it supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (a fake word, by the way)? Or is it pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis (a real word, by the way)?

If you guessed either of these—or pretty much any other word—you'd be wrong. That's because the most difficult word to say in the English language is "No."

As leaders and managers, we are faced with myriads of yes-or-no questions almost on a daily basis. But how we answer those questions—whether we say "Yes" or "No"—can drastically affect our work, our future, and our very life.

### **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**

Think about this for a moment: Each of us only has 24 hours in our day. And each of us only has 365 days in our year. There's no escaping those facts. But the point is not to think about time itself. The point is to think carefully about what we are filling that time with.

Every decision that comes along can be a "Yes" or a "No." But as black and white as that may seem, the reality of it is decidedly greyer. That's because every time you say "Yes" to something, you are, by default, saying "No" to something else. And that can be a

problem for leaders and managers when the "Yes" answers begin to get in the way of what's crucial.

Steve Jobs summed up this concept nicely in a now-famous quote. He said,

*"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done, as I am of the things we have done. Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things."*

Success, innovation, achieving your goals—whatever your focus may be, they all depend on speaking that most difficult English word. They all depend on saying "No."

### **Whose life are you living?**

Taken to its fullest extreme, if we let "Yes" rule our world, we could end up living our life to suit everyone else's priorities rather than our own. Yes, it's nice when someone acknowledges our skills by turning to us for help. But we have to keep in mind that if we're going to pick up something new, we'll likely have to drop something else to make it possible. What is that something else going to be? Which option—the something new or the something else—is going to be worth my time and effort? Which



option is going to lead me to success? Which option is going to lead me to innovation? Which option is going to lead me to my goals? As leaders, we need to be able to discern the difference and make the right decision.

Keep in mind that it's important to say "Yes" to the right opportunities, but it's even more important to say "No" to the wrong opportunities. If we aren't able to take a stand for ourselves and say "No" once in a while, we're going to find ourselves governed by the dictates of everyone else. What's more, we'll eventually come to resent the fact that we aren't living for ourselves. It might not happen right away, but, with time, it will destroy our mojo and leave us bitter and dejected. That's not a good place from which to lead.

### **Sage advice**

On the first day I started working, I was given some sage advice by a senior manager. At my induction, he said,

*"Let me tell you something Peter. The secret to success is learning what to let drop off the end of your desk."*

That was—and still is—an excellent summation of this concept of knowing when to say "Yes" and when to say "No."

As leaders, we needn't be afraid to let some things drop. We needn't be afraid to say "No." This notion of equating things dropped with saying "No" is actually very apt. How distressed are you when something gets pushed off your desk? It's not the end of the world after all. If you need that thing in the future, you can always pick it back up again. Saying "No" is exactly the same. Yes, it may mean that you miss some opportunities. But the one sure thing about opportunities is that there are more where they came from. And next time, maybe you'll be in a better position to say "Yes" rather than "No."

### **Give it a try**

So why not give it a try? Fill your days with what's important to you by uttering the most difficult two letters, the most difficult syllable, the most difficult single word in the entire English language. Take back your success, your innovation, your life, by saying "No."



## The Cold Hard Truth That Solves Seemingly-Unsolvable Problems

Let's just be direct about this one: As leaders, we like to think we know the answers...but we really don't.

That's not to say that you somehow lack in what you do. Yes, you are gifted and talented and good-looking and kind to puppies and blah, blah, blah. But believe it or not, some problems are far, far bigger than even you or I in all our business perfection. There are indeed problems that we can't handle by ourselves. There are problems to which we don't know the answer. And unless we learn to be open-minded about this, and a great many other things, those problems will plague every waking moment.

What's more, these problems will exist long after you are gone.

### Wicked problems

Keith Grint, a professor of public leadership and management at Warwick Business School, explains that the most complicated problems—wicked problems, as he styles them—simply cannot be solved by any one individual. More to the point, these wicked problems can't be solved even with your brilliance.

What's the solution then, to these complicated problems? It starts with having an open mind.

### Open your mind

First, you have to accept that what I said earlier is true: you can't always work it out by yourself. This is perhaps one of the most challenging lessons that we leaders have to learn. Because of our position, we are wired to make decisions and solve problems. Having an open mind and realising that some problems are bigger than you are can be an important step towards actually solving those problems.

Second, you have to accept that a collaborative approach is sometimes the best solution to these impossible problems. Again, that takes an open mind. You have to be willing to hear different views—some drastically different than your own. You have to be ready to acknowledge that someone else may be able to see the solution that you couldn't. And you have to be willing to take advantage of the benefits of working in collaboration with others. If that doesn't take an open mind, I don't know what does.

Third, you have to accept that there may be a number of possible solutions to the problem at hand. That certainly takes an open mind. We are so conditioned by our education to see things as right or wrong—as having only one answer—that we sometimes find it hard to perceive multiple valid solutions. It's like wearing blinkers to the world. We can see the problem from one angle and one



angle only. In doing so, we miss the nearly infinite number of other angles that are available to us and the solutions they may hold. When you open your mind, you take off the blinkers and begin to see the problem from all sides.

And fourth, you have to accept that you may need each and every one of those possible solutions to keep the wicked problem at bay. Again, we are conditioned to expect that there is only one possible solution to the problem (like  $1+1=2$ ). We have to open our minds and take hold of the reality that some problems won't go down without implementing a multi-pronged approach. Sometimes we have to attack from different sides to be victorious. Realising that cold hard fact requires an open mind.

### **The first step**

Opening your mind can be a tricky process, especially after years of doing it the other way. But don't fret. Getting started is actually easier than you think.

All it takes is for you to close your mouth, open your ears, and listen. That's right, the path to an

open mind starts in your ears. Start asking others about your wicked problems and then listen—really listen—to what they have to say. Get your team together and turn them loose. Sure, you can guide the meeting, but make sure you listen more than you talk. You'll be surprised at the insights that can come from a group discussion about the problem at hand.

Soon you'll realise that vanquishing the wicked problems that rear their ugly heads isn't a task suited for a single champion. Rather, these seemingly unsolvable problems are bested by the good of a group—an army, if you will. You can be the leader of that army if you start to have an open mind.

### **Get out there and listen**

So what problem have you been trying to solve alone that needs an open mind? What problem have you been trying to solve that needs a fresh approach? What problem have you been trying to solve that needs an army to conquer it?

Identify what it is and then get out there and listen.



## The Single Biggest Predictor Of Consistently High Performing Teams

The phrase “Play to your strengths” has been around for a long time, but the message didn’t hit home from a leadership perspective until Curt Coffman, and Marcus Buckingham released “First, Break All the Rules – What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently” at the turn of the millennium. And playing to strengths is just that – something the world’s greatest managers do all the time, both for themselves and their teams – yet SO many managers miss this entirely.

Now, real strength isn’t just what you are good at; it’s what energises you. That means that when you play to your strengths, you get better results – and become far more engaged with your work. I believe it is THE single biggest strategy you can apply to skyrocket your organisation’s performance AND engagement at the same time.

But for most of us, getting to know our strengths is the biggest hurdle. It’s all too common to know our weaknesses yet be completely inarticulate about our strengths. For those of us who don’t know how to identify strengths where can we start?

It’s easier to think if you ask the right questions – just grab a pen and some paper and get stuck in.

### **When was the last time you felt a real buzz?**

One of the best ways to do it is by going through your diary. First of all – look back over the last

few weeks. When was the last time you felt a real buzz? Think about the times you felt at the top of your game, ten feet tall and bulletproof when you seemed to lose all sense of time because you have been fully engaged in what you were doing when you felt completely engaged and ‘in the zone.’

What were you doing? Make a note of it. Make sure it’s not about what other people were doing or saying, just focus 100% on what you were doing. The best way to that zone is to play to your strengths, and understanding what you were doing at those times is the key to identifying your strengths.

Now, look through your diary over the next few weeks. What are you looking forward to? Which are the days when getting out of bed won’t be a problem? When you can see that time will just fly by. What will you be doing? What is it about the activity that energises you?

Now let’s go back again, but this time we’re going to span years and decades rather than days and weeks. As you reflect back over your life, what kind of stuff did you find easiest to learn? What type of things did you pick up naturally, almost as though you already knew them, but they just needed bringing to your conscious attention? Whether in education, or socially, or at work – what comes naturally to you?

Look back over your answers and find the common themes. When you were at your best, you will



almost certainly be using your strengths, when you are at your worst you will almost certainly be using your weaknesses. Even common themes of weaknesses are helpful to tease out – because they will be indicators of the strengths on ‘the other side.’

Think about all of these things in the context of work – although if you get completely stuck, then it may be more helpful to look elsewhere. What are your hobbies? What clubs or associations do you belong to and why?

Talk through your notes with someone who knows you well – but remember that although they can see what you are good at, you are most qualified to identify what really energises you. Work through the notes you have made and start pulling out the common themes – then decide on your top 5.

### **Use them**

So once you have identified your top 5 strengths, what next? The answer is incredibly simple.

Use them.

Gallup research has indicated that only 17% of workers in the UK have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. Imagine if it was 70% – or even higher in your organisation? What would that do for results AND engagement?

Once you have worked on this yourself, then take the same approach with your team. But don't be tempted to skip doing it yourself – to really understand it you need to experience it and model it.

But be warned. The world doesn't care whether you use your strengths or not. It doesn't care whether your team use their strengths or not. It cares about getting the job done. So it's your responsibility to make sure that you and your team get the job done in a way that puts strengths to work.

This is a big deal. Why? Because 40 years of Gallup research has revealed that the single biggest predictor of a consistently high-performing team is the answer to the question “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.”

What answer would your team give?



## Great Leaders Don't Have Them

We've all been there as a leader. It's the end of the quarter. Performance is down, key projects are running late, frustrations are high, and our plate is full. We've not been checking in with our direct reports as much because there is so much to do.

Then, on Monday morning, an employee walks in with a huge problem. But instead of helping them work out how to fix it, we're so stressed and so worried about what's on our plate that we just fix it for them. The employee is relieved, the task is finished, we've marked it off the to-do list. Everything's fine, right?

Wrong.

Next time the employee encounters another problem, what will happen? They will come to you. Imagine if the employee comes to you once a week for the next year. That's 52 extra meetings. 52 extra tasks. 52 extra headaches.

### Rule #1

Remember rule # 1 of leadership? It's not about you! The first step towards developing a winning team is to make sure you're not the one with all the answers. It's easy to spend our time always dishing out advice and ideas – after all, when people come to us that's what they need from us isn't it?

No.

Think about it. How many times have you talked through something that was bothering you only to find that by articulating it, everything fell into place and you knew exactly what to do about it? When people come to you don't just give them the answer – that's training them to hang up their brains as they step through the door. Help them to work it out for themselves. How? First of all, by just listening (that means letting them talk more than you do!) Secondly by asking questions. Not answers with a question mark on the end – asking real, open questions that will get them thinking.

### Everything changed

One manager I worked with confessed he had a team member who called him an average of 10 times a day. I was shocked. Simply by asking the right questions *everything* changed and within just a few weeks it became a regular occurrence for him not to hear from them all day.

Rudyard Kipling put it like this:

"I keep six honest serving-men

(They taught me all I knew);

Their names are What and Why and When

And How and Where and Who."



### Put them to work

So follow in his footsteps and put his honest serving men to work:

- What do you think is the problem? What have you already tried to resolve it?
- Why do you think the problem occurred? Why does it matter?
- When did it start? When does it happen?
- How could you begin to address it? How can you move it forward just one step?
- Where else may have you solved a problem like this before? Where do you need to go for help?
- Who do you need to get on board? Who can help you?

I'm not going to overcomplicate this post. It's short and sweet – because the message is very, very simple. Great leaders don't have all the answers.

Great leaders have great questions.

So if you have employees who are too reliant upon you to do the thinking, how can you move it forward just one step?



## Why You Need To Stop Travelling At The Speed Of Life

It's been said that time moves at the speed of...well, life (often slightly slower than the speed of light.)

Sometimes things get going so fast that the details around you begin to blur together. It's at times like these—when life is whizzing by—that you can lose the plot. Business these days can get pretty hectic and, as a leader or manager, you have umpteen-million things thrown at you through the course of your waking hours. Some are good, and some are bad. But how can you determine which is which if you're travelling at the speed of life?

### Press pause

However fast and furiously things are being thrown at you, it is essential to press pause once in a while and reflect on the progress so far. Not sure what to do when you press pause? Not sure what you should reflect on? Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of your precious time.

### What's going well?

First, ask yourself what's going well. Success can be blurred or washed out when we're always on the go, so it's important to "stop and smell the roses" sometimes. We need to see some success—however small it may be—to keep ourselves motivated. Stepping away from the hustle and bustle of your busy day can help you identify where your successes lie.

### Why is it going well?

When you've identified at least one thing that is going well, take some time and try to work out why it's

going well. Is it something you're doing differently? If so, what is it? If it's not you, is it something your team is doing? If so, what is it?

More important than identifying the successes themselves is determining why they occurred (or are occurring). Success should never be hit-and-miss—it should be repeatable. Knowing why something is working allows us to replicate that success in other places.

### What isn't going well?

As nice as it is to revel in our successes, it's also necessary to examine our failures. When we take the time to reflect, we should also identify what isn't going well. Is there part of the process, or a project as a whole, that isn't up to par? Separating the good from the bad can help us refocus our efforts where they will have the most impact.

### Why isn't it going well?

When you've identified what isn't going well, look a bit deeper and see why that particular project isn't performing. Is it something you're doing differently? If so, what is it? If it's not you, is it something your team is doing? If so, what is it?

### Find your pause button

Believe it or not, the simple act of pressing pause to reflect on your successes and failures can turbocharge your learning and transform you into a continuous development machine.



But what is involved on reflection other than the questions we've just outlined? Is it simply a matter of sitting back in your chair, closing your eyes, and thinking? To some extent yes, it's as simple as that. But that method isn't for everyone. Some keep a daily journal. Others find that a regular dose of free writing is a great technique for emptying their head to make room for quality reflection.

If you'd like to try the free-writing technique, simply set a timer for 10 minutes and start writing what you're thinking. Don't restrict your thoughts—go wherever they take you. And keep going until your time is up. Then go through what you have written and identify key learning points. Think about ways you can harness those points to move forward and take action.

The hardest part of all this may actually be finding the time during your day to hit the pause button. If you see that as a problem, try scheduling 15 minutes right after lunch to reflect on your business as a whole. You're already somewhat relaxed which

will make the transition into quiet time all that much easier. Close the door or go somewhere you can close the door if you don't have one, silence your phone, and turn off your email. Then just think and write and think some more.

And if that doesn't work for you then try my personal favourite – go out for a walk.

There's a reason that people say a good walk clears the mind. Because when we go for a walk, the heart pumps faster, circulating more blood and oxygen not just to the muscles but to all organs—including our brain. In fact, some experiments have shown that after or during exercise, even very mild exercise, people perform better on attention and memory tests – in other words, their minds are clearer.

Whichever way you choose to pause and reflect, don't wait another day. Get started right now and find the success that may have been passing you by.



## There Is No Silver Bullet

“I’ve heard it all before.”

Big mistake.

If you want to become a truly inspirational leader please, please don’t let these words slip out of your mouth.

I come across SO many people who are only interested in hearing something new about leadership. And as they tirelessly pursue their quest for new things they are willing to discount everything they have learned over the years as irrelevant – simply because they already know it. They are only interested in hearing something they have never heard before. They assume that because leadership is hard, they just haven’t found the answer yet. It’s barmy – and yet surprisingly common.

Well, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that a lot of unnecessary waffle has built up around leadership over the years. We can discard it without any problem whatsoever. The bad news is that however hard we look, there really is no such thing as the silver bullet. Leadership involves effort – and the best way forward is to focus on applying what you already know, rather than diverting all your efforts into searching for something that doesn’t exist!

A couple of months ago I was speaking to a director about a seminar he had been to that week. He summed up his remarks with the words “It was nothing new, I’d heard it all before!” and then dismissed all of it.

### **Therein lies the problem**

The world around us is filled with the frantic hunt for new answers, and it’s easy to get swept up in the hype. Always on the hunt for something new, the latest thinking, the latest ideas. “If I learn this one new thing everything will fall into place. All I need to do is load the barrel with my shiny new silver bullet and fire.”

Whatever the subject, the constant search for the shiny new silver bullet actually does nothing for simplicity. Instead it creates more and more theories and models, faster and faster than ever before! The very thing we are looking for becomes buried deeper and deeper in extraneous information, and the real message is impossible to find.

Leadership is a case in point. The constant search for the silver bullet of leadership has buried the true messages of leadership. When I last typed “leadership” into Google, it gave 760 MILLION results in half a second! There’s so MUCH stuff out there it’s impossible to find what you really need. Rather than the information era shedding light on leadership, the opposite is true. Thousands of different models and concepts mean it has become shrouded in mystery like a complicated chemical formula only university professors can understand.

But leadership is simple. It’s not easy, but it IS simple.

### **A needle in a haystack**

Did you know the average person in the UK spends almost six months of their life searching for ev-



eryday things like keys? And those of us with more stuff spend longer because the more stuff we have to search through the harder it is to find what we want. Searching 760 million results for the keys of leadership is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

I'm going to let you into a secret. People have been leading other people for a very long time. And the essence of leadership has been around for centuries. Millennia even. We don't constantly need to find new answers.

Everything you ever need to know about leadership is covered in two simple but powerful rules.

We have covered rule #1 in an earlier post and will soon come to rule #2.

So here's my challenge to you. Forget the search for new answers because the silver bullet is a myth. Instead, ask the question "what do I already know about great leadership?" Follow that question with "and what am I doing with what I already know?" Because leadership isn't actually about what you know. I'm really not interested in what you know. I'm interested in whether you are doing it.



## It Takes A Ton Of Feathers

Which weighs more, a pound of lead or a pound of feathers? It's actually a trick question that astute readers (or those who have heard the "joke" before) will immediately see: A pound is a pound is a pound...regardless of the material involved.

But ask yourself this question: Even though the lead and the feathers both weigh a pound, which material would have more impact when dropped on your head from say, six feet up? The lead! Of course, it's the lead. No one in their right mind would voluntarily let you drop a one-pound lead weight on their head. The feathers, on the other hand, might actually have people lining up for the experience.

So why in the world are we discussing lead and feathers in a leadership blog? Because the idea of these materials, and having them dropped on your head, applies directly to the comments and conversations we have with our employees. But before we delve into lead vs. feathers, it's important to establish some terms.

For the sake of clarity, let's lump all the other words we can think of that apply to leader-to-team communication (e.g., comments, conversations, instructions, compliments, etc.) into one, all-encompassing term: Feedback.

This idea of feedback, then, comes in two flavours—negative and positive. Negative feedback is like the pound of lead. Positive feedback is like the feathers.

So again, which would you rather have dropped on your head from six feet up? The answer is still the

same. But equating positive feedback to feathers and negative feedback to lead brings up two crucial points:

1. Negative feedback has a very powerful impact (just like the pound of lead on your head.)
2. It takes a lot more positive feedback (perhaps a TON of it) to have the same impact.

We might step out on a limb and say that negative actually weighs more than positive, metaphorically speaking, of course. That simple inequality (a pound of negative feedback does not equal a pound of positive feedback) can, and should dictate how you interact with your employees.

### **Negative feedback: 'Just a dash.'**

Negative feedback is a difficult, but essential part of any leader's job. You don't want to do it, but sometimes it's necessary to get things back on track. Think about the feedback you have received over the years and you will immediately understand the concept that negative weighs more than positive. The negative feedback you received is far more memorable than the positive feedback. It had a very powerful impact. It's the same for your employees. Any negative feedback is going to have a profound effect on how they do their work...or at least we hope it will.

Now we're not saying you should shy away from negative feedback. It's a necessary part of the leadership process. What we are saying is that when you need to dish out a pound of it, you need to ask



yourself “How much positive feedback have I been giving?” Whatever you do, don’t simply mix your positive and negative feedback, it just confuses the message, but remember that over any period you’ll need to give a tonne of positive feedback to equal the scales.

### **Positive feedback: ‘Pile it on.’**

It takes so much more positive to equal the impact of the negative. As a leader, you need to make sure that for every piece of negative feedback you deliver, you counter it with five or six pieces of positive feedback. Remember, it takes more positive to have an impact.

So make it your job to “catch” people doing things right. Then tell them about it. Compliment them on their actions. Show them how they made an impact. Express your gratitude for their efforts.

Be specific. Be genuine. And whatever you do, don’t seal it up and save it for the quarterly review. In fact, as soon as you have read this post write out a list of things you appreciate about your team members. Do it again every day, then get busy telling them. They can’t read your mind, after all.

You will be absolutely amazed by what happens.

### **The power of a sincere ‘Thank you.’**

The power of genuine appreciation and particular thanks, when delivered sufficiently, far outweighs the power of any negative feedback you may have to give. Yes, you need to have both sets of feedback in your quiver and be ready to use it when the need arises. But you also need to be more liberal, more giving, with your appreciation, because it’s this positive feedback that will ultimately do the most good.

Sure you can motivate someone to improve through negative feedback, but it only works for so long before everything begins to grind to a halt. Who wants that? You don’t, and neither do your employees. Reinforcing positive behaviours with positive feedback, on the other hand, encourages employees to continue exhibiting those behaviours. And by making a conscious effort to use the behaviours you like, they’ll leave the bad ones behind.

So the next time you have to deliver negative feedback, remember the other side of the coin: Sometimes it takes a tonne of feathers to the head to make a real, and lasting, impact.



## If Your Organisation Was A Football Team

While many seem to think leadership begins with big visions and strategy, Henry Ford nailed it when he said: *“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”* And once you have got your head around the two rules of leadership, I believe this is the best place to start. Too many sports teams are bursting with talent and know exactly what the goal is, yet lack any real connection – they are just a bunch of talented individuals. Almost invariably, when the chips are down, they fail. Inspired leaders make sure they connect with their team, and their team connect with each other. In the complex field of interpersonal relationships this is a tough one, but worth every bead of sweat ... because it makes or breaks a team.

### Internal alignment

For me, this question goes back a long way. At school, I was one of the tallest boys in the year – which made me something of a target for any kid who wanted to show off. I had no interest in fighting, so when these situations arose I would walk around the corner and stand in front of the staffroom window – but on the odd occasion I would find myself with no way out, and a fight seemed unavoidable. The thing was because I really didn't want to fight half of me would end up throwing a punch – and the other half of me would be pulling it back at the same time. Not exactly the way to make an impact, and it's safe to say none of these fights was particularly impressive!

And we can be like that at work – whether we are looking at an individual, team or organisational lev-

el, we could save SO much time and energy simply by getting out of our own way.

I talk about internal alignment a lot. I often get asked the question – “What is internal alignment? It sounds like a weird medical procedure?!” Well, rest assured – no surgery is necessary. Internal alignment is simply about capturing the power of ‘getting out of your own way’.

Just think about it – and be honest. Over the years:

- how many of your frustrations, worries and constraints have only existed in your head?
- how often have you found team members working against each other rather than with each other?
- how many times have you seen things ‘dropped’ as they pass from one department to the next?

### The average organisation

And it really does matter. According to research completed by Harris Interactive, if we compared the average organisation to a football team:

- Each player would pass the ball to only 2 other teammates
- Only 4 players would know which goal is theirs
- Only 2 would care
- Only two would play in their best position and know exactly what they are supposed to do
- And all but two players would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than the opposition



A 'lucky' team may have the same 2 players passing to each other, shooting for the right goal, playing their best positions and knowing exactly what they need to do. But we both know that even 2 out of 11 just isn't anywhere near enough.

Enter an organisation with internal alignment:

Dysfunctional relationships across the organisation have become partnerships built on mutual respect and understanding.

Activity builds on strengths of the organisation and its component parts rather than focusing solely on what's wrong with it.

Everyone knows what the final goal is and most importantly have bought into WHY it matters.

### **A better way to play**

So with internal alignment, your team would be entirely different. Each player would:

- pass the ball to any and all of their teammates
- know AND care which goal is theirs

- play in their best position and know exactly what they are supposed to do
- work *with* their team members and direct all their energy against the opposition

Surely that's a better way to play?

So if you want to have a real impact, if you want to make the most of the resources you have in a challenging environment, then it's time to start creating internal alignment – just like Henry Ford.



## The Magic Ingredient For Brilliant Team Relationships

The right seasoning can enhance a delicious meal. As leaders, if we want to enhance our ability to connect with others we need to add the magic ingredient.

Vulnerability.

The days of the boss who had all the answers should be wisely left in the last century with Taylor's Scientific management, which sadly still lingers on like a bad smell. He unknowingly put a massive amount of pressure on generations of managers. We have been left with the legacy of "I'm the boss – I'm supposed to have all the answers – it's my job! If I admit I haven't got all the answers, then surely that makes me weak."

Rubbish.

### **Vulnerability isn't weakness**

Vulnerability takes courage. Vulnerability involves accepting and owning up to the fact we can't do it alone. And if you really want to do it on your own then, for goodness' sake don't be a leader!

Leadership can act in a zone where management cannot. Leadership involves accepting that we don't have all the answers.

Let's be clear, I'm not talking about letting it all hang out and tweeting your most intimate personal secrets with the whole wide world. But I am talking about being real. About being willing to admit mis-

takes, share hopes and fears – and admit that we don't have all the answers.

Author & researcher Brene Brown says "Vulnerability is the absolute heartbeat of innovation and creativity" and "There can be zero innovation without vulnerability." Why? Because vulnerability moves the leader to engage their whole team and organisation, not because it's the "right thing to do", but because the leader can't do it without them. Great leaders know the best source of answers in any business is at the sharp end, not in the ivory towers.

But vulnerability also allows us to relate to people, to connect with people. It is the crowning glory that completes a connection and makes it last.

### **Perilous pedestals**

Rather than describe vulnerability as a concept, let me show you what I mean.

I don't know about you, but as I read books and (good) blog posts, I often find myself putting the author on some sort of pedestal. After all, they're writers and most people who talk about writing do no more than talk about it. The more I read, the more pedestals I create, and the more pedestals I create, the taller they become until I am left looking up into the lofty heights of authorship feeling woefully inadequate. And as I attempt to write my book, all sorts of thoughts run around my head. What am I doing? Who am I to write a book? I'm



not a professor. I'm not a head of state. I'm not a four-star general. I don't even have a PhD. What am I thinking?

But these people are just ordinary people. Ordinary people who also lose their keys, break things, have arguments, spill drinks down their front, take wrong turns, make mistakes and hopefully learn from them. They have likes and dislikes, they have hopes and fears, they have insecurities and soft underbellies. But when we put people up on those pedestals they become unattainable, unreachable and completely unconnectable.

On the face of it, I have impeccable credentials. I have a Degree and a Masters Degree; I am a Chartered Engineer and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development. In my profession I couldn't aspire to any higher accreditation. In fact, the standing joke at home is that despite my occasional silliness, I have more letters after my name than I actually have *in* my name. And it's not just the letters. I *know* I'm very good at what I do. But underneath I am still thinking "at some point someone will switch on the lights and realise I am just working this out as I go along!"

I have led teams. I have achieved results. I have learned from others. I have made stupid mistakes. I have learned from those too. I'm a real person with experience of what works and what doesn't – I'm simply bringing it together into one place. And that's exactly what most authors are. They are nor-

mal people with some ideas to share. Some ideas are their own, some they have learned through experience, some they have learned from other people.

### **We are in the arena together**

So what has happened now? A very few of you may have thought "Hmm – this guy clearly doesn't know what he is talking about" and switched off. But most of you will have thought "I know what you mean! I feel like that sometimes." And as a result it has become abundantly clear that I'm made of flesh and blood – the same stuff we are all made of. Then turn this into a two-way conversation where you follow with "Well Peter, for me, it's like this..." sharing what's going on in your head, and before we know it, we are coming alongside each other. There is no pedestal for either of us to stand on. We are in the arena together, and we connect.

So it's time to let the force-field down, to take off the mask and be honest with your team. Because the more perfect you appear to be the greater the distance that separates you – so close the gap by opening up and being honest about what's going on in your head. You will be surprised at the results.

So stop thinking you have to be perfect. Let some of your imperfections show, connect with your team and learn to rely on them – because you really can't do it without them.



## You Can Make Them Care – Here's How

Way back in 1969, during one of the Apollo 11 press briefings in the NASA command centre in Houston, Texas, the reporters were waiting for the NASA officials when they noticed someone with a broom. One of the reporters asked what he was doing. I have no idea if the reporter was trying to score points, pass the time or was genuinely interested. But the iconic reply was “I am putting a man on the moon.”

Can it get any better than that, to have all levels of an organisation with a unified understanding and commitment to a single mission? John F Kennedy united a whole nation in the pursuit of a single goal. They achieved so much more than putting a man on the moon. There's probably only one thing that has driven more scientific discovery than the moon landing – war. I don't know about you, but landing on the moon sounds like a healthier option,

### **Theirs but to do and die**

At the other end of the spectrum, Tennyson's poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade” tells a sad story of failed leadership that sent 600 men to their death in a pointless exercise against the wrong target. I won't get all morose and poetic on you now; we'll just squeeze in the second verse:

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”

Was there a man dismay'd?

Not tho' the soldier knew

Someone had blunder'd:

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

Theirs but to do and die:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.”

Nobody could question their courage – but we would be right to question their wisdom. What if someone had actually asked, “Why?” Maybe the outcome could have been entirely different? In fact, the whole war could have been avoided with “Why?” but that's another story.

Fast forward over 150 years and we are still facing the dilemma that all teams can describe what they do, many can describe how they do it, but few have really got to grips with WHY they do it. When we crack the ‘why?’ question, teams and organisations can achieve remarkable things that once appeared to be impossible.

### **Start with why?**

Getting to grips with the why is an incredibly simple – yet powerful concept. In the book “Start with Why” Simon Sinek argues that the most inspirational leaders don't start with what – they start with why. In the first pages, we read about the mathematics



professor Samuel Pierpont Langley who set out in the early 1900s to be the first man to pilot an aeroplane. He was highly regarded, incredibly well funded, surrounded by a dream team of talent and know-how and followed everywhere by the press because his success was pretty much guaranteed. Or was it? Sinek goes on to say:

*“A few hundred miles away, Wilbur and Orville Wright were working on their own flying machine. Their passion for flying was so intense that it inspired the enthusiasm and commitment of a dedicated group in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio. There was no funding for their venture. No government grants. No high-level connections. Not a single person on the team had an advanced degree or even a college education, not even Wilbur or Orville. But the team banded together in a humble bicycle shop and made their vision real. On December 17, 1903, a small group witnessed a man take flight for the first time in history.”*

*“How did the Wright brothers succeed where a better-equipped, better-funded and better-educated team could not? It wasn't luck. Both the Wright brothers and Langley were highly motivated. Both had a strong work ethic. Both had keen scientific minds. They were pursuing exactly the same goal, but only the Wright brothers were able to inspire those around them and truly lead their team to develop a technology that would change the world. Only the Wright brothers started with Why.”*

Interestingly enough, Samuel Pierpont Langley gave up once the Wright brothers succeeded. He refused

the opportunity to further develop a technology that would change the world. Was it because of the bad press? Was it because he wanted to be first and there was no glory to be had in second place? Perhaps if he had really understood rule # 1 of leadership, then he would have been able to tell his grandchildren a different story.

### **Give them something to care about**

So what's the why for your team or organisation? As Simon Sinek puts it “What's your purpose? What's your cause? What's your belief? Why does your organisation exist? Why do you get out of bed in the morning? And why should anyone care?”

If you haven't got a clear why for your organisation, then how can you expect people to care? How can you make sure you attract and keep the right people? How can you make sure you deliver? Think about it – what's your why? And remember profit is a result, not a why.

Having a clear why really mobilises an organisation and its customers to achieve great things. And it works the other way – when organisations lose track of why they do what they do, bad things happen. From ethical disasters at a senior level to rubbish customer service at the coal face. Don't let that happen to you.

A clear why is absolutely essential. What's yours?



## Don't 'X' Out Your Team

Someone in your team not quite living up to expectations? Want to do something about it? Good news – you can. Bad news – the problem inevitably starts with.... You.

Let me explain using principles established decades ago that will nevertheless create a massive shift in your team's performance today. In 1960, MIT Sloan School of Management Professor Douglas McGregor created and developed two theories of human motivation. In essence, McGregor identified two different types of manager:

- One who mostly applies 'Theory X'.
- One who mostly applies 'Theory Y'.

These theories can have a profound effect on how well, or how badly, your employees are motivated, and thus, how well or badly they perform. So what is 'Theory X'? What is 'Theory Y'? And how do they influence the behaviour of your employees? Let's find out.

### What are McGregor's theories?

In his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, McGregor described two radically different sets of general assumptions—two theories—that form the basis for two opposing managerial styles.

#### 'Theory X'

'Theory X' assumes that employees are lazy, un-trustworthy, lacking in ideas, and only motivated by money or fear. The 'Theory X' manager transfers

this pessimism to his management style where it manifests as a hands-on—some might say domineering—approach to getting results.

#### 'Theory Y'

'Theory Y' assumes that employees want to do a good job, are trustworthy, full of great ideas, and motivated by achievement and recognition. The 'Theory Y' manager transfers this optimism to his management style where it manifests as a drive to relate to the worker on a more personal level.

Both theories can have a powerful impact on the motivation of your employees. But there's more at stake than just motivation. McGregor's theories show us that the way we choose to manage our employees—through pessimism ('Theory X') or optimism ('Theory Y')—can actually create certain traits in our employees where none existed before.

### The self-fulfilling prophecy

A self-fulfilling prophecy is any positive or negative expectation about circumstances, events, or people that may affect behaviour and cause those expectations to be fulfilled.

### The Pygmalion effect

The idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy can be illustrated by an experiment from the 1960s conducted by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. In the experiment, a teacher was given the names of five students who had been identified as "intellectual bloomers." This meant that those five students



would do better than expected in comparison to their classmates. At the end of the study, those five students showed significant statistical gains when compared to their classmates.

Rosenthal and Jacobson concluded that teacher expectations influenced student achievement. The teacher believed that the five “intellectual bloomers” would excel and her resultant behaviour—how she treated them compared to how she treated the other students—made it so. This type of positive self-fulfilling prophecy became known as the Pygmalion effect.

But for every positive, there has to be a negative. In the case of the self-fulfilling prophecy, this negative became known as the Golem effect.

### **The Golem effect**

In 1971, Stanford psychology professor Philip Zimbardo conducted an experiment (infamously known as the Stanford Prison Experiment) to test the hypothesis that inherent personality traits of prisoners and guards are the primary cause of abusive behaviour in prison.

Twenty-four males were selected based on their psychological stability and health. Twelve of the participants were randomly assigned to be guards while the other twelve were assigned to be prisoners. Conditions within the “prison” quickly deteriorated as both guards and prisoners internalised and exhibited (to an alarming degree) the roles that had been assigned to them. Though the experiment was intended to last two weeks, it was cut short after only six days.

Zimbardo concluded that situational attribution of behaviour (external characteristics) rather than dispositional attribution of behaviour (internal

characteristics) caused each group to act as they did. Because the guards expected the prisoners to behave in a certain way, they treated them with those expectations in mind. And because of the guard’s actions, the prisoners acted accordingly.

### **The lesson for managers**

How you view your employees and behave towards them has a profound effect on how they perform. You can choose to be a ‘Theory X’ manager and view your employees as lazy, untrustworthy, lacking in ideas, and only motivated by money or fear. Or you can choose to be a ‘Theory Y’ manager and view your employees as ready to work, trustworthy, full of great ideas, and motivated by achievement and recognition. Either way, chances are your employees will become what you expect them to be whether they started that way or not. Either way, your management style creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So if you have someone on your team who you see through the lens of ‘Theory X’, whose fault is it? As managers, we can make incorrect assumptions and easily wind up ‘X-ing’ people out. Whether we mean to or not, every time we treat someone as though ‘Theory X’ is true, that’s what we ultimately create: lazy, untrustworthy, uncreative employees who are only motivated by money or fear. It may not happen right away, but it will happen.

So take a moment to examine your management style and the way you view your employees. Are you operating under ‘Theory X’ which has the tendency to create a Golem-like self-fulfilling prophecy? Or are you operating under ‘Theory Y’ which has the tendency to create a Pygmalion-like self-fulfilling prophecy?

Maybe it’s time to shift your assumptions and re-think the way you manage your team.



## Rule #2 Of Leadership Revealed

This is it – it’s time to reveal all. I’ve dangled rule #2 of leadership in front of you more than once without telling you exactly what it is – it’s time to bring it out into the open.

Remember – everything you need to know about leadership comes down to one of two rules. Everything else is just noise. Rule #1 of leadership tells us that leadership is not about you! It’s not about your instructions, your solutions, your ideas, your ego – it’s about THEM!

Before I reveal rule #2, let’s just check in with the theory of Authentic leadership.

### Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is not the only leadership theory doing the rounds today, but it’s the one that will lead us to rule #2. Authentic leadership isn’t about being a born leader or developing a fixed set of characteristics – it’s simply that we need to be authentic, turning up at the top end of who we really are. It’s less about trying to be someone else, and more about being yourself, brilliantly.

Anyone of us can be a leader, but it starts with having a clear understanding of who we are, what we stand for, what our strengths and weaknesses are, and behaving in a transparent way that puts all of these things together.

Remember John Maxwell’s 5 levels of leadership. Level 1 is when people follow because they have

to. Level 1 in the biscuit factory meant a queue at the clock machine 5 minutes before the end of the shift, each one changed and poised to slide the card through the reader the second they could leave. This is where they give you their minimum, never their best. However...

- At level 2 they follow you because of the RELATIONSHIP you have with them
- At level 3 they follow you because of what you have done for the ORGANISATION
- At level 4 they follow you because of what you have done for THEM as an individual
- At level 5 they follow you because of WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU REPRESENT

Each level represents a deeper level of commitment than the one before. Shifting from one level to the next is all about choice – but not your choice, theirs. (That’s rule #1!) If we have a boss, we HAVE to work for them because they’re the boss – that’s leadership as a position – level 1 leadership. But when we CHOOSE to follow someone because of what they DO and WHO they are, then the sky’s the limit!

Apparently much misquoted but no less powerful for it – the words “Be the change you want to see in the world” bring us face to face with rule # 2! In fact, rule #2 of leadership is as simple and profound as rule #1 – Rule #2 of leadership recognises if you want the best from those around you it starts with what YOU do and who YOU are.



### It begins with who you are

Rule #2 of leadership states – Leadership is ONLY about you. And a whole host of theories – from Avolio’s to Zaleznik’s – state if we want to inspire others, it begins with who we are.

And that’s the leader’s biggest challenge. When the chips are down, and everything seems to be going down the pan, we want everyone ELSE to change. We feel like we are the only ones who care. The only ones who really understand the situation. As far as we are concerned we are the LAST ones who need to change – THEY are the ones who need to change!

But the environment in our teams is simply a reflection of us! Leadership – and life – is a lot like that. Things go a little pear shaped from time to time. And it’s not unusual for us to blame others when they do. But real leaders look themselves in the mirror and say – if I want anything to be different – it starts with me.

### The power of rule # 2

That’s the power of rule #2. Rule #2 says let’s stop waiting for everyone else to get their act together and start cleaning up our own act. If others are ever going to live up to our expectations, then it starts with us. How are WE behaving? Are we standing up for what we believe, or are we just doing time? What DO we stand for? Who ARE we?

Nelson Mandela nailed rule #2 when he said: **“until I changed myself I could not change others.”**

But don’t go thinking this is anything new. Back in the ancient world:

- Lao Tzu said *“Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power.”*

- Cicero said, *“The enemy is within the gates; it is with our OWN luxury, our OWN folly, our OWN criminality that we have to contend.”*
- Jesus said, *“as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”*

We can only make a difference by starting with ourselves. Our own beliefs. Our own thinking. Our own behaviour. Ancient wisdom understood rule #2 LONG ago.

Rule #2 recognises people around us do not come with remote controls. If we want to change our environment, we can only start by changing ourselves. Because as leaders, our thinking and behaviour CREATES our environment. It’s ONLY about us!

### What environment are you creating?

It’s time to ask ourselves – what environment are we creating?

Today, we are simply rediscovering and repackaging what was understood long ago. And when it comes to leadership too many of us are sat on the floor – surrounded by wrapping paper – playing with the boxes rather than using the messages right at the heart.

We live in a complex age. And the one thing our age is crying out for is simplicity. So let’s take the lead with these 2 simple rules. Because there isn’t a SINGLE element of leadership – at home, at work, in school or in the community that doesn’t hinge on them.

You see, there’s no such thing as the perfect leader. But the next best thing is a leader who really gets AND uses rule #1 and rule #2. Do you?



## Why You Need More Mistakes

I came across a definition of leadership the other day that really struck a chord.

*“Leadership is...not perfect.”*

All it takes is four simple words to tell us that, sometimes, the path of leadership is not a straight line. It’s not perfect. Occasionally, the only way forward is a zigzag.

Think about a mountain road. Do mountain roads go straight up one side and straight down the other? No. They go where the solid ground is. This means they often zigzag back and forth, back and forth from base to peak and down again. Is it the most efficient path to travel? No. Does it take longer to travel this zigzag path than it would a straight line? Yes. But the destination for both paths is still the same. Both paths reach the other side of the mountain.

But while the literal road over the mountain is the result of meticulous planning and calculation, the metaphorical road over the mountain—our leadership—may sometimes be the result of mistakes and setbacks. Does that mean we have somehow failed as a leader? If our path—be it a particular project or our life in general—tends to wander and wind at times, does that mean we should just give up and go home? Absolutely not.

### **Mistakes are inevitable**

One thing I can guarantee is that, as leaders, we will

make mistakes. At times, we will successfully implement things we have learned. At other times, we will get distracted and forget to implement what we know. The fact that it happens is not the point...because it will happen, over and over again. The point is that when mistakes occur, we have to remember to give ourselves a break. Sometimes we have to take a step back to take three steps forward. Sometimes the road has to go left, right, or even down before it can go up or over. We have to let it.

If leadership is about who you are and what you represent, then it’s a life’s work. It’s not about each and every mistake you make along the way. We are all a work in progress and will zigzag our way toward becoming the best we can be. We will also zigzag our way toward inspiring the best in others. The thing about mistakes is that they tend to get lost amongst a lifetime of successes. Yes, the destination can make the difficulties that inevitably come worthwhile, but the whole process of growing and developing as a leader is what leadership is all about, just as the whole process of growing and developing on the journey is what life is about.

It’s very much like driving... perhaps over that very mountain road of which we are speaking. When we get going 60, 70, or more miles per hour, the landscape outside becomes blurred and we can lose some rather important details. To reverse a common aphorism, we can lose the trees for the forest. Only when we slow down will those details become more readily visible.



### **Keep on truckin'**

So keep going. Keep getting it right. But slow down once in a while and take a look at how you got where you are. And by all means, keep making mistakes. Yes, you read that right. Keep making mistakes.

Sometimes, making mistakes can be more instructive than getting it right all the time. The important thing about making mistakes is to learn from them. When we examine our mistakes, see how and why they occurred, and reflect on what they mean, we can gain insights about a project, about leadership, about life, that we would have missed had the road been straight. So keep reflecting. Keep learning. And by all means, keep moving forward even if it's just little by little.

### **Fulfil your potential**

One thing I know. Whether your road is a straight line or a zigzag, if you choose to do so, you can absolutely fulfil your potential as a leader. You already know most of what you need to know—if not all of it. So just do it! And if mistakes occur—if your

road begins to curve back on itself—don't be afraid to slow down and examine the process. Don't be afraid to examine your leadership. Don't be afraid to examine your life.

If that seems daunting, get help. I am always on the lookout for senior leaders who really want to make a difference, to examine themselves, and to examine the leadership process. And, contrary to popular belief, asking for assistance is not a sign of weakness. It means that you know yourself. You know your abilities. You know your strengths and your weaknesses. It also means you are humble enough to realise that someone else may be better than you in some areas. Both of these—self-knowledge and humility—are important characteristics of a successful leader.

I can be that help. I can help you find success amidst your mistakes. I can get you back on the road that leads to the peak, the pinnacle, the top of the mountain. I can help you get so much more out of your team. Just drop me a line and let's have a chat.

