

## ARE LEADERS BORN OR MADE?

There are many people who are clearly to a large extent "born" to be what we call leaders.

**Heroes** are among them. We can think of a George Washington, a Winston Churchill, a Nelson Mandela, who were all heroes to their people. Their larger-than-life achievements, personas and capabilities may indeed be partially 'gifts' that then had to be honed through practice and made manifest in the crucible of crucial experiences -- either those experiences they sought out or else those that came their way. These heroes often lead by the inspiration of their abilities and talents.

**Exemplars** is another appellation. While the heroes above were certainly exemplary in many ways, Mandela was more specifically a moral exemplar in transcending hatred and forgiving his captors; Gandhi was an exemplar in standing for peaceful resistance; Albert Schweitzer as a missionary, physician and humanitarian was an exemplar: an example of humanity we can all rally to. Such exemplars are usually morally courageous people, who take a stand in pragmatic ways that have a practical impact on others. They lead by example.

**Charismatics** are often considered leaders in that people like being around them, and they have a magnetic personality that draws people to them. They 'lead' in the sense that others will follow, and you will find such so-called 'natural born' leaders everywhere, from the school playground to a social gathering. When they speak, others listen. Often, such people become political

leaders or stand out in the spheres of entertainment and communication. They lead by force of personality.

Being heroic or gifted in some way, exemplifying values and convictions and having the charisma to get attention and have people desire to follow you are all important attributes, and they can certainly be parlayed into leadership.



However, you can also be a great hero and a poor leader, a wonderful exemplar and yet ineffective in getting your agenda through, powerfully charismatic but unable to build leaders and teams underneath you -- only acolytes and followers.

So, leadership in the sense that it can be "made" or "taught" or "developed" -- all the above potentials can certainly be improved and can require great sacrifice and dedication to fulfil, but to some extent are more talent-based -- is about the following skills, convictions and capabilities:

- ✓ The ability to **enrol** people behind a visionary objective or future and to make that future aspiration credible and personally relevant to their own lives and aspirations. Leaders enlarge people's abilities by enlarging their aspirations: by opening up larger possibilities to take on.
- ✓ The ability to **galvanise** efforts by linking people's values and priorities to the visionary

objective, while **synergising** them into a collective community of people who sign up to deliver these aims and who agree to be mutually accountable for them. Leaders tap beliefs and desires and call on commitment and connection.

- ✓ The ability to **mobilise** and convert intentions into action and to break ground with the most value-adding, relevant, urgent and powerful "bold courageous steps" that can create potent forward momentum. Leaders are action catalysts and ensure action begets feedback loops and real-time learning.
- ✓ The ability to **focus** efforts and to synchronise them, so the activity in a team or organisation becomes a net multiplier of capability, not a net nullifier of it. Leaders ensure efforts are concentrated, prioritised and leveraged.
- ✓ The ability to **follow through** on the most critical areas of focus and the most crucial vision- and mission-central priorities established. Leaders also ensure everyone's definition of 'winning' and 'losing' is harmonised and makes sense, based on what success and failure mean in the actual marketplace and with real customers.
- ✓ The ability to **encourage and enable** progress always and breakthroughs when possible. We need to keep our batteries charged, and meaningful real-time encouragement of the right attitudes, actions, interactions and commitment is powerful. Leaders know encouragement is a personal matter and customise recognition whenever they can. Leaders also have to find out what is impeding progress, unearthing bureaucratic or hierarchical passion killers and tackling them with zeal to unlock potential and enable success.
- ✓ The ability to **challenge** plateaus, inertia, unconstructive behaviours, roadblocks and organisational gridlock, as well as nay-sayers, cynics and others. However, paradoxically, to retain the ability to **be coachable**, to hear divergent viewpoints, to make room for the devil's advocates (as long as their commitment to the vision is not in question), to listen actively to ideas and suggestions and

to be approachable and accessible, retaining hospitality for helpful input from wherever it may come.

- ✓ The ability to **face facts** fast and with sufficient humility to learn their lessons rather than rationalise away the sting of insights that may reflect badly on past decisions or actions. Yet, always to face those facts with the **imagination** to convert the barriers into opportunities and to be an alchemist with obstacles, not just a chemist.

## Leadership is essentially the value added

You know a leader is present – finally – by impact. A leader is ultimately someone who delivers a result through others that would be unlikely to be achieved otherwise. A leader is measured by the value they add to the assets they have in their stewardship, delivered through the people in their charge, who have to optimise those assets and convert them into organisational capabilities and business performance.

Leadership, then, is essentially the **value added**. It is known by its impact, not solely by its attributes. So leaders are "made" insofar as they have to **build the skills** of:

- ✓ Enrolling, galvanising, synergising, mobilising, focusing, following through, encouraging and enabling, challenging, being coachable, facing facts, responding with imagination and seeking always to add value to the efforts of their teams and colleagues.

"To make it easy to deliver value" and to "increase the value that can be added" are the high water marks of leadership contribution.



Thomas Edison once said, "***If we could only do what we are capable of, we would literally astonish ourselves.***"

After all, what more could be asked? And certainly nothing more would really be needed.

Buckminster Fuller said that he looked for what needs to be done, pointing out that, after all, that is how the universe continues to design itself.



Imagine if leaders ensured that their teams first defined and then did what most needs to be done and delivered what they are capable of, while

actively removing the interference and barriers that could keep that capability from evolving and growing. Surely that has to be the litmus test of real leadership.

Yes, this may be a life-time's education and development. And indeed, not all leaders need to be equally skilled in all of these aptitudes. Wise ones will assemble a team accordingly, to build on

their own talents and to reinforce or bolster areas which are not their own greatest strengths.

Leaders also need to develop a "teachable point of view" or TPOV as it was called in GE. In other words, they need to find out what they are best at modelling, teaching and representing and to empower other leaders with other TPOVs to fill the gaps and ensure a richer overall leadership continuum.

However, leaders seriously deficient in any of the above need *deliberate practice*. All of these are 'necessary' if not 'sufficient' to the exciting, extraordinary and exhilarating challenge of growing leaders rather than followers, building teams and not just groups, producing customer success and not just customer responsiveness, and co-creating with others a culture that can anchor both today's success and tomorrow's vision.

*Extract from a longer article by  
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Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

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We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ...

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