



The Human Dimension

THE LEADER WITHIN

July 2006

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"We help both people and productivity flourish by developing a positive culture of shared leadership."

We find improved performance is the reward for your investing in people.

The emphasis in THE LEADER WITHIN is on the changes and growth we make within ourselves, as leadership is basically a personal growth experience over time.

'For things to change first I must change.'

Leadership Lessons From Indigenous People:

From my personal association, reading and study of indigenous experiences there is a lot we in western cultures can learn from indigenous experiences about leading others.

We assume our perspective and way of doing things is best, as we in affluent societies find ourselves as part of that small minority in the world with the greatest access to education, materials, and wealth. In fact the emphasis on economic improvement as a way to ensure our individual and collective happiness is increasingly being shown to produce the opposite result.

(Read 'Growth Fetish' by Clive Hamilton; 'Reworking Success' by Robert Theobald; 'Economia' by Geoff Davies, among others).

Growth and ever increasing wealth is producing more a sense of unease, restlessness and dissatisfaction with modern life.

Where can we draw lessons, which will enable us to regain a sense of perspective and to ensure we thrive and flourish, not shrivel and withdraw into our own personal worlds?

Leaders need to provide a sense of hope and vision for a better future.

One such forum was the recent Emerging Pacific Leadership Dialogue with the theme "Navigating our future together" which was held earlier this month for 140 participants from 19 nations across the Pacific. My partner and wife, Lyn Russell, conducted the first two days for the 20 EPLD group leaders. The

participants came together to hear of experiences and potential solutions to deep and significant challenges which each Pacific region country faces as they move into an increasingly connected world. How can they, and we, learn from one another?

Here are some of the differences which from my perspective inform an indigenous perspective and which can enrich a 'western approach'.

1. A connection with the earth and the spirit which sustains all life.

Our separation from nature and sense of isolation of modern city living produces a 'poverty of spirit', which we struggle to regain. The business of modern corporate life and the multiple demands of living in our individualized worlds produce high stress experiences.

What can we each do to ensure we regain some perspective and ensure we tap into the living world around us, and the wonder it contains?

2. An honouring of ancestors and those who have gone before, extending to acknowledging the wisdom of the elders in the community.

Economic imperatives appear to be dictating the need to retain and recruit 'older' workers; yet we are a long way from honouring the wisdom of those who are our elders. It will come eventually and each step we take in listening and incorporating the rich and varied experience of the organisational and community elders will add immeasurably to our collective experience. How could we honour and tap the wisdom of those who have gone before us?

3. Leadership is 'on behalf of' and 'in partnership with' the community one is representing and never an individual pursuit.

At best most of modern day leadership is on behalf of shareholders and stakeholders both of which are transactional relationships based on return on investment measures, not on the intrinsic value of the collective experience of the sets of relationships. Who do we truly represent in our leadership roles?

4. A sense of guardianship is evident and a deep sense of responsibility for the impact on the earth and its people over time.

We lack a sense of custodianship where we have the opportunity and responsibility to leave a positive legacy. We can see some moves towards this with the introduction of triple bottom line measurement of the wider societal impact our business' have on our society. On the other hand the lack of virtue and sense of propriety in the behaviour with too many of our corporate leaders and Boards means we are failing to ensure we are in alignment with higher order values. What are those values that are integral to our future as a world?

5. A collaborative and respectful decision making process based on what is best for the whole community.

Again what is best for a limited number of people is usually the benchmark. Rarely do wider societal long-term benefits figure strongly in decisions - it is usually more expedient and driven largely by a variety of political considerations. Can we identify within our own leadership roles the effect of our decisions on the community as a whole over the long term?

6. High regard for relationships and roles in the context of kinship connections.

Relationships in our modern economy are important but often because they will serve our particular interests in some way, now or into the future. Our families and the idea of extended families are increasingly difficult to retain. We are too busy and find our sense of community in virtual as well as in communities of shared interest, which increasingly extends beyond our immediate geographical communities. What positive impact could we have if we held higher regard for family and kinship?

7. Stewardship figures prominently which is drawn from the extended community paradigm.

Who is in our community of interest and for what reason? Where does our personal sense of stewardship arise and how do we sustain it? Who and what forms our extended community?

Indigenous Leadership according to Dr Manuka Henare of the New Zealand Institute of Leadership is about "developing self to serve the people"; "love of culture and family networks" and "an interactive process in which leaders and followers engage in a mutual interaction in a complex environment to achieve mutual goals".

We have much to learn from such Indigenous notions of leadership as we go about performing our leadership roles to 'navigate a different future together'.

Call to Action:

In some respects the executive coach role, which many executives, managers and leaders are using as an external sounding board and as a way of accessing their own internal wisdom through structured and confidential conversations on important matters, is the replacement for the wisdom of the indigenous experience.

We lack the time and connectedness in today's frantic world to get perspective and sense making of our myriad of experiences we have in a sense outsourced the answers to an external and trusted outside confidant - your coach!

Well if you have not yet taken the plunge to work with your own coach, now is the time!

We can provide coaches and train your people to take a coaching approach to their roles.

To talk over what might be helpful email us or contact me by phone.

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