



# The Human Dimension

## *THE LEADER WITHIN*

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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.'*

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### ***Becoming a Strategic Leader:***

Much is made of the importance of strategy in today's organizations. A well-crafted, well-implemented strategy and the best strategic thinkers are seen as essential to an organization's or team's long-term success. Even so, managers and executives often struggle to move strategy beyond setting direction or goals and toward an on-going process of transforming and sustaining their team or organisation.

Much of the 'background' stress we can experience as part of modern day living is because we fail to think and act strategically. We are constantly surprised and even overwhelmed by events around us. We are shocked by the pace and direction of change and fail to initiate ways of thinking which put us in the drivers seat. We too often act out of "victim mode".

When we are acting strategically we envisage what 'might be', and how future possibilities balance with the 'here and now'. We show the capacity to provide originality of thought and develop innovative solutions which account both for the short term as well as the future.

Effective strategic leadership requires different skills and perspectives than those required by operational leadership for the following reasons:

- **Broad in scope.** Strategic decisions impact areas outside our own functional area, business unit or even organization. An effective strategic leader sees the organization as interdependent and interconnected so that actions and decisions in one part of the organization are undertaken with consideration to their impact on other parts of the organization. To develop more of this approach we

need to think of our team or organisation as an organic living system consisting of people who are all different, and each influencing the future direction. This way new thought and initiative will invariably impact on other parts of the system.

- **Future focused.** Strategic work takes place over long periods of time. The strategic leader operates with a far-reaching timetable, integrating short-term results and a long-term focus. To develop more of this way of thinking we need to read widely, be discerning and become attuned to trends around us. We need to not just absorb what we read, but apply our own wisdom and experience and ask ourselves how is this important in the long term? Take for example climate change. This issue has been emerging for decades and yet only recently has this become mainstream in the media. If we are only reading about issues in the daily press and watching it on the news it has already happened. Begin to think in terms of what has yet to occur.

Not all leadership requires a forward view to be effective. Very good operational leaders manage day-to-day functions effectively and are skilled at working with people to ensure that short-term objectives are met.

- **Change oriented.** The strategic leader is often a driver of organizational change. The impact of his or her work cascades or ripples throughout the organization. Accept change as part of life and welcome uncertainty.

Effective operational leadership does not necessarily institute significant organizational change. For example, achieving the quarter's targets may require that your team works well together -- an important leadership task -- but it does not necessarily require change.

Strategic leaders may come from all functions and work at any level in the organization -- it is not just the job of top executives.

For example, a purchasing manager can anticipate the impact on engineering and manufacturing, of switching a supplier. Or a human resource director can develop systems to encourage cooperation across business units. Every person is in a unique position to scan the environment, spot trends or concerns and make sense of that information. This is when we begin to apply intellect, intuition and common wisdom to what we observe and think about.

Seeing ourselves simply as individuals with just a job to do and acting in isolation from one another, is personally unfulfilling and ultimately unproductive and from an individual standpoint, career limiting.

### **Debunking the Myths of Strategic Leadership**

If you think strategic leadership isn't in your job description, think again. You may have been misled by one of these common myths about leadership and strategy:

- **"Strategic leadership is the CEO's job."** True, the CEO is ultimately responsible for deciding upon a path for the organization. Yes, the

senior management team is usually involved. But this does not mean that these people are the only strategic leaders in an organization. Strategic leadership is best exerted when information and knowledge from the top of the organization is combined with information and applied intelligence from the bottom ranks. Middle managers are in a unique position to do this.

- **"I need to be strategic; my people don't."** It's not enough to be good strategic leaders yourselves. We have to foster strategic leadership in others as well. In fact, we should focus on others as much as -- if not more than -- on ourselves. Why? The process of creating and sustaining competitive advantage is too complex for any one person to develop and carry out. Often others have better perspectives and insights than us and we really do need everyone's mind being applied to today's problems and challenges.
- **"Leading strategically is about making the right choice at the right time."** Crafting strategy is more of a discovery process than a matter of choosing among a set of options at a given time. It involves discovering the few key things that the organization needs to do well, and can do well, in order to differentiate itself from other competitors in the industry. Discovery takes discipline and a commitment to continuous learning throughout the organization. We all need to think in terms of a never ending journey of uncovering and searching for new initiatives and ways of doing things. Be prepared to be surprised and always use curiosity over certainty.

The focus of strategic leadership is the enduring success of the organization or team, and the work of strategic leadership is to drive the organization so that it will thrive in the long term.

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### **Call to Action:**

This checklist is taken from a monthly magazine called Fast Company. How do you stack up as a leader against these insights?

When GE's CEO Jeff Immelt teaches 'up-and-coming' leaders at the company's famed management-development centre, he runs through a checklist of what he calls "Things Leaders Do."

In an interview with Fast Company, (April 2004 edition) Immelt reveals his own leadership checklist.

#### **1. Personal Responsibility.**

"Enron and 9/11 marked the end of an era of individual freedom and the beginning of personal responsibility. You lead today by building teams and placing others first. It's not about you."

#### **2. Simplify Constantly.**

"I always use Jack (Welch) as my example here. Every leader needs to clearly explain the top three things the organization is working on. If you can't, then you're not leading well."

### **3. Understand Breadth, Depth, and Context.**

"The most important thing I've learned since becoming CEO is context. It's how your company fits in with the world and how you respond to it."

### **4. The importance of alignment and time management.**

"There is no real magic to being a good leader. But at the end of every week, you have to spend your time around the things that are really important: setting priorities, measuring outcomes, and rewarding them."

### **5. Leaders learn constantly and also have to learn how to teach.**

"A leader's primary role is to teach. People who work with you don't have to agree with you, but they have to feel you're willing to share what you've learned."

### **6. Stay true to your own style.**

"Leadership is an intense journey into yourself. You can use your own style to get anything done. It's about being self-aware. Every morning, I look in the mirror and say, 'I could have done three things better yesterday.' "

### **7. Manage by setting boundaries with freedom in the middle.**

"The boundaries are commitment, passion, trust, and teamwork. Within those guidelines, there's plenty of freedom. But no one can cross those four boundaries."

### **8. Stay disciplined and detailed.**

"Good leaders are never afraid to intervene personally on things that are important. Michael Dell can tell you how many computers were shipped from Singapore yesterday."

### **9. Leave a few things unsaid.**

"I may know an answer, but I'll often let the team find its own way. Sometimes, being an active listener is much more effective than ending a meeting with me enumerating 17 actions."

### **10. Like people.**

"Today, it's employment at will. Nobody's here who doesn't want to be here. So it's critical to understand people, to always be fair, and to want the best in them. And when it doesn't work, they need to know it's not personal."

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