

Effective leadership

We believe that leadership is an attitude — not a job, not a set of behaviours, not stuff you can learn on a training course. We're proud that little we say is original (it's been tried and tested elsewhere), and one of our starting points in discussing leadership is *Serve to lead*, which is the motto of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. What this is saying is: "if you, Mr or Ms Trainee Officer, expect to lead that squad of experienced soldiers, you had better be in service to them first".

This immediately raises issues for many British people who equate service with servitude and servility. You only have to go into most shops, or contact most call centres, to experience that first hand. You can cut the resentment the person is feeling that they have to do the job with a knife.

Yet being in service describes an approach, it isn't a value judgement, and it's an approach which turns out to be useful if you want to sell people something or lead them.

Is not *Serve to lead* an expression of that approach? It results in behaviours, such as "officers eat last", but the behaviours do not define leadership. They are what leaders do.

Serve to lead is a good motto. Arguably it is a little too concise, though, and instead we use the precept *Make the other person more important than you*. I love this as a definition of leadership because it seems so meek and mild, it couldn't possibly have any real effect. But try it. For 24 hours, make everyone you meet, not just the people in your business, but everyone (and not just the ones you select, but everyone), more important than you. You do this by using this precept to continually inform the question "what is the most useful thing I can do [or say] now which makes them more important than me?" and you then do, or say, that thing.

Whether or not leadership is an attitude, at one level is not the point. The point is that you will find it useful and helpful if you do think of it in this way. Someone who wants to become a leader doesn't have to learn how to do all the things a leader does (which are arguably infinite in number). They need only learn a small number of ways of being which can them inform every situation in which they are called to act.

Even more important, by defining leadership as an attitude, we are empowering everyone to show leadership abilities. By this, I'm not saying everyone has to drive the bus. One person needs to be in charge, but being in charge isn't a leadership role—it's a management task. (More accurately, it's a management task with a specific responsibility.)

We have twelve precepts of leadership, and another important one is *Be the change you want to see in the world*. This, of course, was said by Gandhi, and it encapsulates the idea of responsibility. If, as a leader, we see that something is needed in our business or on our team, and we do nothing to bring it about, surely we are failing our colleagues. By a leader "being the change", we interpret Gandhi's words both literally — if you want people to be peaceful and live together in harmony, then you have to do that first — and metaphorically as saying "bring about the change". If it is beyond your powers, empower others to do it.

Unless, as a leader, you embody the things you want other people to do/feel/believe, you haven't a hope in bringing about such changes in them. Feel the fear and do it anyway. This is the title of a book by Susan Jeffers. For us it sums up the idea that leaders have to be willing not only to show their people the way, but also to go there themselves first. Although it conjures up images of leaders valiantly leading their people to the promised land, whatever the dangers, for us it has a much more important significance in the real world.

This recognises that people can be resistant to moving forward. Sometimes they don't want to be led. Simplistically, they don't want to be shifted from their comfort zone. More deeply, they are being asked to show up, take responsibility or go somewhere new, any and all of which can be frightening, just because they're unknown. On the whole, if a business is stuck, the people in it are stuck and they are more or less showing up where the leader is stuck. This paper isn't long enough to explain why, so please go with this idea. If the business is to move forward, the leader has to deal with his/her stuff and this can be a fearful proposition. But unless the leader is willing to confront their issues, and resolve them, their business ain't going anywhere.

We believe it is a fundamental leadership quality to be willing to go for it. To deal with whatever is blocking progress and move the business forward. And what happens when you've felt the fear and done it anyway. Jeffers explains that there is something else to feel the fear about and do that any way... And something else, and something else... Such is life. Such is being a leader.

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