Call Yourself an Effective Leader?

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We all think we are good leaders but is this always true? Effective leadership is arguably the top business and political issue at the moment, for without it there is no direction or vision for steering through the issues challenging companies and government: governance, managing supply chain risk, cash flow, revenue generation, cost control, sustainability and globalisation.

Leadership responsibilities extend beyond the Chief Executive Officer to include all those in the organisation. In the procurement team, the role may be delegated to team members as part of their professional development. The Chartered Management Institute in the UK suggests the following definition of leadership, that it is “the capacity to establish direction, to influence and align others towards a common aim, to motivate and commit others to action, and to encourage them to feel responsible for their performance.”

This article draws on various sources and gives hints and tips on how to create that winning mentality.

The world of sport gives excellent examples of the characteristics of leaders. Lord Sebastian Coe, the chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) was an accomplished athlete, securing the gold medal for the 1500 metres at the Moscow Olympic Games (1980) and the Los Angeles Olympic Games (1984). He also secured silver medals at both these Olympiads.

In his recent book, Lord Coe talks about winners sharing certain characteristics:

- They set ambitious goals.
- They are relentless in their pursuit of excellence.
- They are their own toughest critic.
- They practice endlessly.
- They accept when they have been beaten by a better player.

It is no secret that leadership in the sporting world can be easily translated into the business world. Gerard Chick, Head of the CIPS Leaders’ Network (CLN), wrote about leadership and winning teams in his monthly ‘K-mail’ (No. 5 May 2009). He wrote that “while in many organisations success or failure is often attributed to the CEO, the reality is that in truly winning organisations or teams, there is a group of people, coupled with systems and processes...which make up the winning team”.

We can therefore suggest the following hints and tips for leadership success:

- Successful organisations have their people, processes and systems aligned to organisational objectives. This alignment aids the contribution to operational effectiveness.
- The leader will draw on established management thinking, for example, on the work of Dr Meredith Belbin who explored the different roles of individuals within the team. A high performing team will be greater than the sum of its parts.
- The successful leader will know where the organisation is now and where it needs to get to.

Ronald A. Heifetz, the co-founder of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, consolidated his ideas of leadership under a number of themes:

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1 CMI Checklist No. 041, ‘Leading from the Middle’.
• **Leadership.** Leadership is the activity of mobilizing the community to tackle tough problems. It is not the same as authority or management which is about obtaining well-defined, orderly results through a planning and budgeting process. Leadership’s function is to enable change. Setting the direction for that change is of paramount importance. Leadership is more inductive and intuitive than planning and budgeting and does not result in detailed plans. In order to set a direction leaders will analyse the data to look for patterns, relationships and linkages, and develop the vision.

• **Problem solving.** Through their teams, leaders provide solutions to problems.

• **Equilibrium and disequilibrium.** Leaders have to balance periods of stability and stress. Leading organisational change is about managing the balance.

• **The holding environment.** Managing organisational change requires the need to create a ‘holding space’. This is a safe organisational space in which the conflicts, emotions and stresses related to the change associated with the vision can be worked out.

• **Charismatic authority.** Going back to Greek and Roman times, people would follow a charismatic leader. Sometimes this would create the danger of placing too much trust in the leader, and following a leader who was more about image than substance.

So, bearing in mind the above, clearly there is room for all of us to lead effectively.

Our organisations depend on it.