



Leadership

How to inspire and drive superb business performance

Do you aspire to run your own team of mortgage brokers? Or are you already doing so? Corporate Crossroads founder **WALTER BELLIN** explains the essential qualities of an authentic and successful business leader



Since the early 1990s, researchers have gathered a huge amount of statistical evidence that an organisation's culture is the single most important factor in its long-term success. Thus, culture building is a critically important leadership responsibility.

LEADERSHIP, SELF-AWARENESS AND CULTURE BUILDING

Through communicating and utilising an organisation's vision and values, there are a number of specific

culture-building leadership activities managers or executives can undertake. However, to undertake these activities successfully they must begin by working on themselves. For example, it is important that the organisation's leaders devote time – through training, being coached, using psychological instruments and self reflection – to learn to be highly self-aware. This should include awareness of their strengths as well as their current limitations or 'Achilles' heel' – that is, habits or patterns of communication or behaviour that work against the quality of workplace relationships and culture they wish to create.

It is this kind of self-awareness that enables leaders to manage themselves well – the first essential step in being able to lead others effectively. This ability empowers leaders to communicate and interact with people in ways that foster mutual trust and respect and good workplace relationships throughout the organisation. It enables them to contribute to creating a workplace without fear – and one which encourages employee engagement, commitment and innovation; it assists them in creating effective communication and teamwork within teams and between different teams; and such leaders will be more effective at coaching, mentoring and developing the people they lead!

Along with self-awareness and good self-management, there are two other essential ingredients that enable leaders to undertake these types of culture-building activities successfully. The first is a great deal of face-to-face communication when attempting to influence people.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, psychologist Albert Mehrabian conducted a meticulously designed study of the factors that impact and influence people

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Six things leaders must learn to be aware of every day

- 1** Effective listening by leaders is at least as important as communicating well
- 2** In depth, accurate understanding of yourself is the key to understanding and working with those whom you lead
- 3** You need to communicate clearly what must be done – but it is even more important to explain why it should be done
- 4** Leadership is not a position – rather it is skill in influencing the thinking and behaviour of those in the team you lead
- 5** Trust and respect for you – the true currency of leadership – must be earned by people witnessing your behaviour over time
- 6** In the end, your character as a person will impact the effectiveness of your leadership more than any specific skill

when someone communicates general messages about things such as vision and values. He found that only 7% of the impact was due to the actual words chosen – hence the ineffectiveness of written documents for this purpose. His study showed that 38% of the impact of the communication came from voice qualities (volume, pitch, resonance, rhythm, tempo) and 55% from body language (especially facial expressions). Thus, 93% of a leader’s ability to influence people requires much face-to-face communication.

However, there is a second factor that determines people’s responsiveness to a leader’s attempts to influence them – their authenticity!

LEADERSHIP AND AUTHENTICITY

More than anything else, a leader’s ability to influence, engage with and win the commitment of the people they lead is determined by how well the leader’s words match their actions. Generally people are much more influenced by watching the day-to-day behaviour of a leader than by hearing their words. They want to know:

- Does the leader really believe in and hold the values that they claim to believe in and hold?
- Are the leader’s daily actions consistent with the priorities and objectives they espouse?
- Do they, in fact, really walk the talk?

It is these things that determine whether a leader is seen to be authentic – and this will affect people more powerfully than anything the leader says.



“People are much more influenced by watching the day-to-day behaviour of a leader than by hearing their words”

Clearly, it is the leadership role – when undertaken by authentic and inspiring leaders – that breathes life and spirit into a company or firm. The management role, of course, is still very important – a business can flounder just as badly when its activities are poorly managed as when it is poorly led. Yet a well-managed organisation in which managers and executives lack real leadership skills will not win the engagement, loyalty and commitment of its people. It is fostering these human characteristics among the organisation’s people that creates high-performance cultures.

Over the past 25 years in consulting with over 200 companies and professional firms, I have noticed that many managers and executives spend much more time managing than leading. Partly, I think this is due to many managers feeling more comfortable managing than leading, since many have not taken the time to develop the self-awareness, self-management and people skills that are essential. Partly, I believe it is because they do not realise how greater emphasis on leadership will improve the performance of their business. Invariably, when managers and executives focus much more on developing and using their leadership capabilities, the organisations they are leading experience two interrelated results: there is a major improvement in business performance – and employee morale and retention is much higher! **MPA**

Walter Bellin has been a consultant to private sector companies, professional firms and federal government agencies in leadership development and organisational culture change for 25 years. He is the CEO of consulting firm Corporate Crossroads and author of new book *Climb a Different Ladder: Self-awareness, Mindfulness and Successful Leadership*. For more information, visit corporatecrossroads.com.au



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