

# Taking the lead

*Mark Wright* wants to start a leadership revolution – and he wants you to be part of it

**I** offer you the opportunity to revolt. One conversation at a time, one meeting at a time, and one project at a time, I want you to take the lead. So many times we leave the responsibility for leadership to the people with a bigger job title. Today, that can change.

Your job title matters not one jot; it is your behaviours and values that make a difference. For one moment, consider the implications of uncoupling the action of leadership behaviour from the positional power that comes with a job title. If you remove the assumption that leadership is about 'being in charge of things' and replace it with the idea of 'leadership being a set of behaviours with a sphere of influence', then suddenly it is all to play for. Whereas the first phrase creates a sense of pressure on the burgeoning leader and gives everybody else the option of abdicating responsibility, the second gives us all the choice and responsibility to make a difference.

Now, it is certainly true that some people will have a relatively small leadership sphere of influence compared to others, but that doesn't really matter. It is a sphere; it extends all around us – and can be stretched through remarkable, creative behaviours, irrespective of job title. Cleaner or king – it makes no difference to me.

Hold on, I hear you cry, we can't all be leaders – life will be too anarchic. Well, that's true, so maybe leadership isn't an all-or-nothing option. Maybe we need to add some other behaviours into the mix.



In my line of work I spend a fair amount of my time talking to people about what they do in their business, voluntary organisation or creative endeavour. Inevitably the conversation eventually comes around to issues of management and leadership. 'What's the difference? How do I know if I am a leader or a manager?' they ask. We then get into a conversation about respective mindsets, behaviours and aspirations and almost always end up with a 'leadership good, management bad' kind of discussion. We talk about leaders having vision, passion, strategic intent (*hooray!*), while managers implement rules, processes and controls (*boo!*). It seems to me that the easy caricature – or maybe our experience – of Management (the capital M is intentional) gets in the way of really thinking about the value that purposeful management behaviours can bring. With effective management (replace with 'delivery/process refinement/implementation' if you prefer) then the ideas, vision and passions of leaders have a chance to gain traction.

Indeed it has been my privilege over the years to meet some amazing, creative leaders who engender huge loyalty and passion in their organisations, but who then go on to achieve frustratingly little because of a lack of effective management behaviour either in themselves or those around them. I have also worked with some incredibly well-resourced and hugely efficient corporate clients which are suffering a death by a thousand cuts at the hands of Management doctrine. Both desperately need to find the balance of vision and drive, process and plan, in themselves, as well as their organisational structures.

But is this enough? Unfortunately I don't think so – for me, there is a third component and it is the curious idea of 'followership' that forms this little trinity. Followership is a positive activity, with a skill set all of its own: the ability to appreciate where most effective effort needs to be applied, to deliver and to contribute. Effective followership is not passive; it is a challenging, questioning and rigorous desire to understand the vision and work effectively with others. Without great followership, a leader is left exposed and a manager gets begrudging compliance. Encouraging and nurturing active followership should be a leader's organisational priority; gathering people around you who are empowered, clear-sighted and confident enough to positively challenge.

And the great thing about this? The most effective people in any organisation are those who are happy and able to do all three – they lead when they need to, manage the outcomes effectively and have the insight to know when following really well is what is needed.

So what form might your personal leadership revolution take? Well, that will be as unique as you are, but to help you on your way, the world of leadership development is littered with hundreds of 'leadership styles': Transactional, Servant, Charismatic, Dictator, Insider, Outsider, Good King, Mother, Proxy, Warrior, Change Agent ... the list goes on.

In general, there are seven leadership styles that I think are particularly positive and useful in the context of the cultural sector. I don't expect anybody to be equally comfortable using all of them. Indeed, sustaining just two or three effectively would be good going; but understanding when the time is right to act boldly and appropriately, sometimes in an unexpected direction or unfamiliar way, can be critical. Here are my favourite leadership styles:

- **Charismatic** – effective and charming, this style can please the crowds as long as there is substance to back it up.
- **Collaborative** – a great favourite in the cultural sector, this leadership style is all about inclusivity and consensus but, if over-used, it can appear timid and bland.
- **Transactional** – getting the deal done and being clear about what is expected in return for appropriate reward, this style is efficient and simple, if sometimes lacking emotional sophistication.
- **Transformational** – a dynamic force for change that can produce incredible results but often at a high price, this leadership style is high-energy and turbulent.
- **Quiet** – leading by example, this style is strong on integrity and role modelling with a close cohort but sometimes might be just too discreet.
- **Servant** – this style is all about serving without being servile; it is a style that excels in developing those that follow but needs confidence and assertiveness to pull it off.
- **Situational** – the pragmatism to understand the needs of the current circumstances and lead in the most appropriate and effective manner; great in a crisis but sometimes misinterpreted by others as inconsistency.

## Effective followership is not passive; it is a challenging, questioning and rigorous desire to understand the vision and work effectively with others.

In the real world, effective leadership cannot be about getting it right all the time, but it might be about four simple ideas:

1. Value and appreciate who you are with a vibrant confidence that is tempered by just enough humility to stop it tipping into arrogance.
2. Practise leading every day, regardless of whether anybody needs to be impressed.
3. Develop a solid set of authentic leadership behaviours that you know you can carry off even on a bad day.
4. Accept the fact that leading requires you to put yourself out there every now and again with the resilience to keep bouncing back.

And with the clamour of these four ideas ringing in your head, let the revolution begin. ●



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