

BOSSES CHOOSE MANAGERS ~ PEOPLE CHOOSE LEADERS

IN MY VIEW.....many studies on leadership miss the point. They confuse leading with managing. Management is a function that is undertaken in organisations by people who have been given the formal authority to 'make sure' something is achieved. Managers are appointed by 'Bosses'. Just because someone is given the title of Director or Chief Executive does not mean they are or ever will be a Leader. Fred Goodwin - 'Fred the Shred' – would be a classic case in point. By my definitions, he was no leader.

Let me pose some simple questions about Leaders.... How would you answer them?

Q: How do you know you are a leader?

A: Because people choose to listen to you and follow you

Q: When do you become a Leader?

A: When people choose to listen to you and follow you

Q: Why do they choose to follow you?

*A: Because you show up in a way that brings
or promises to bring value to them*

As Mary Parker Follet wrote:

Leadership is not about formal authority - 'power conferred' always fails because power is self-developing - it comes from interactions among people in which respect is earned

What she is pointing to is that Leaders emerge. We are often leading before we earn the recognition as a Leader. Those who show up in ways and with messages that appear to serve the interests of the people gathered, become the group's Leader of choice. In other words we can only truly Lead by implicit or explicit consent.

In this relationship between follower and leader, there is reciprocity - a giving and receiving of power that actually goes in both directions. If a Leader changes the message or becomes seduced by power and status, becoming self-serving (as in some political leaders – Mugabe being an extreme example), they break the consensual contract; the nature of the relationship changes and it might then only be held in place by fear, obligation or apathy.

The critical distinction I make, is that you are only a Leader if people 'choose' you to follow. If they follow you because they are employed or scared by you, then that does not de facto mean you are a leader. You might simply be a manager or in more extreme situations a dictator, a tyrant, a gang-leader using force to maintain a position. I can see that one could argue that even these scenarios are consensual ie. I choose to 'do as I am told' preferring the consequences of that (e.g. my loss of my self-respect, integrity, congruence) rather than the consequence of disobedience (e.g. being sacked, killed, beaten up!). People who terrorise others into compliance, are not leaders in my opinion; they are bullies.

This then points to another distinction. We have many qualifying, descriptive terms seeking to differentiate... Transformational Leader, Charismatic Leader, Transactional Leader, Authentic Leader, Gentle Leader, Inspiring Leader.... All are attempts to describe desired capacities, competencies and or qualities etc. The danger with such labeling is that we can get drawn into an increasingly long, inexhaustive list of the competencies that 'make a great leader'. This can be problematic because, by their nature competencies are named in hindsight. The competency list is anchored in the present and drawn from the past as if it will be relevant to any future unfolding scenario.

Given the pace of change, complexity and uncertainty unfolding in the world, it has become far more important to find ways to support people/ leaders to better navigate this landscape on an ongoing basis. And this calls on us to let go of outdated assumptions that guide much current thinking about leaders....we'll know something has changed when we start finding Leaders who enquire more than tell; who don't profess to know THE answers or THE direction and who focus on getting people to truly collaborate to sense-make and discern options and choices together; who seek to learn

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and understand; who develop their capacity to see patterns in systems and to act at multiple levels and who hold that continuing to play the game, focusing on sustainability, is more important than winning market shares, beating the competition and destroying the planet in the process... such adaptive capacity might be all we need in a great leader?

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