

# What defines a great leader?



Thanks to Howard Lees for a superb presentation, over the coming weeks we will be publishing some essential leadership resources on our website, and after editing, we will download an abridged video of the talk to our website and on YouTube.

For the benefit of those who attended our presentation, and for those who couldn't make it, here is a recap of the main points of Howard Lees' very interesting and entertaining take on what defines a great leader.

## ENVIRONMENT DRIVES BEHAVIOUR

For your staff that means the office/workplace they reside in, their co-workers, their bosses, etc – you are a massive part of their environment. For most of you, your staff is directly responsible for delivering the work that will determine whether you are successful or not. Your staff holds your success in their hands, so it's probably a good idea to treat them well, in fact, treat them better than your clients.

### Common stereotypes

- ▶ *Bosses who are "Too busy" – it's commonly a badge of honour and it's a very bad thing. When you say you're too busy, you're saying you can't manage your workload, you're delivering uncertainty to the very people who need certainty above everything else.*
- ▶ *Bosses who don't create the conditions for honest feedback – if you punish honest feedback, then you won't get honest feedback, which means you will have no idea what is going on.*
- ▶ *Bosses who focus on loss aversion, not wealth creation - It's easier to focus on not losing what you have as opposed to taking advantage of life's opportunities. Stick or twist?*
- ▶ *Bosses who micromanage - If you are going to do everything then you will be surrounded by bemused competent people who think you are a nightmare to work for.*
- ▶ *Bosses who are Type-A aggressive - Some people believe that the downside of acting in an egotistical manner is worth risking. It never is.*

## NATURAL LAW

Natural law states that when things are left alone a process of evolution will occur. The problem with work, and processes, is that being left alone is not a good thing. Relationships begin to weaken, lines of communication deteriorate or disappear, there is turnover of staff and in the end the original intent has been lost. The lack of maintenance and pruning is evident. To maintain both behaviour and results you need feedback and to get feedback you need measurement. Knowing what to measure comes from the expectations you set about the desired results.

### Natural Law states that it's easier to:

- ▶ *Do your people's jobs for them.*
- ▶ *Speak up for people when they should do it themselves.*
- ▶ *Go to meetings with people when they don't need you.*
- ▶ *Remind people about tasks well before the deadline.*

**Great leaders never leave it up to nature to tidy the garden.**

## THE TRUTH

In order to get a firm hold on what you are like to work for, you'll need to either create the environment for honest feedback, or persistently solicit anonymous feedback (and reinforce people for submitting it, no matter what it says). Survey websites that log your department, age, location etc do not get honest feedback because no matter how much it says "anonymous", the data shows that no-one believes it. The quest for honest feedback is honourable and crucial for effective business.

During his talk, Howard advised that "Unless you have data to the contrary, the only modest position you can take is to assume you are a nightmare to work for."

## SO YOU'VE ADMITTED YOU'RE A SINNER; NOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

- ▶ Observe yourself – write down what you did every hour of the last work day. You'll be surprised at what you learn about what you actually do.
- ▶ Change something – fix something your peers will notice. Our responses are shaped over time, so whenever you're just about to react like you always do, pause, and try something different.
- ▶ Resist the temptation to revert – lasting change is shaped over time. You will revert from time to time, just be aware of this bear trap.
- ▶ The environment has to be created first – everyone is behaving in line with the workplace environment of which they are a part. For change to occur, that environment has to change.
- ▶ The data says, 'focus on the day to day behaviours'. Respond to emails or stop the emails you don't need, return phone calls, close out your actions in a timely fashion.
  - Ten years of Hollin data on projects says that contractors close out approximately 80% of their actions, consultants close out 60%, and clients close out 40% - the irony is that the client is the very one who wants the building built in the first place!
- ▶ High performers get the basics right, every time, all the time.

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HERE IS HOWARD'S FORMULA OF THE

## 8 things you could say tomorrow to be a better leader:

- 1 *"I want you to know that I would really like to be effective helping you in your current role."*
- 2 *"If you think you are drowning, please let's talk about what we can do to fix it?"*
- 3 *"Do you need any help coaching your people?"*
- 4 *"Can I help simplify things for you?"*
- 5 *"I just want you to know that I think being 'too busy' is a bad thing."*
- 6 *"I want you to create a safe place for people to work, I don't care how much it costs."*
- 7 *"What do you think would improve the quality of your day, week, month?"*
- 8 *"I don't want you to fall for the 'meetings trap'."*

Howard's experience comes from working for great leaders, one of whom is **General John Sheehan**, a US Marine and formerly the Supreme Commander of NATO. Here is some of his guidance:

- 1 *Never miss an opportunity to demonstrate good leadership.*
- 2 *Never solve people's problems.*
- 3 *Make sure people keep bringing their problems.*
- 4 *Never break the chain of command.*
- 5 *It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission.*
- 6 *Pithy pieces of wisdom – have a store of easy to understand inspirational things to say to people.*

Howard is very happy to receive your emails directly at [hlees@hollinconsulting.co.uk](mailto:hlees@hollinconsulting.co.uk), and us here at Cequent, on [info@cequent.co.nz](mailto:info@cequent.co.nz) to continue the leadership debate.

In addition, there are free downloads on our website, and at Hollin [www.hollinconsulting.co.uk](http://www.hollinconsulting.co.uk)