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'To see the efficacy of a leader look no further than the team they lead'

Viewpoint

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Teams are a mirror image of their leaders

Every leader wants a team that is energetic, enthusiastic, passionate, innovative, creative and supportive but if all these vital signs are missing, who should take responsibility?

Modern leaders would be wise to give thought to the ideas of Edmond Locard who revolutionised Scenes of Crime work over 80 years ago. Forensic science is based on the central tenet that 'every contact leaves a trace.' When two objects of any description come into contact with one another material is transferred between them: the same is true when leaders interact with their followers.

Today, more than at any other time, there are three maxims that leaders need to be cognisant of:

1. Followers will watch everything that they do
2. Followers will talk about them when they are not there
3. In both negative and positive terms, followers will learn from them and emulate their behaviour.

In short, as followers, our behaviour at work, attitudes to work, commitment and level of engagement with the organisation that we work in is as much a direct reflection of our leader's behaviour as it is anything else. Every leadership contact leaves a trace on each and every follower.

If you want to see the efficacy of a leader and of their leadership style then you need look no further than the team they lead. A team rarely demonstrates more passion or behaves more positively than its leader. Similarly, cynical leaders produce, and therefore deserve, cynical teams.

Innovative, creative and developmental leaders help to produce creative, innovative and developed followers. A team that is enthusiastic, energetic and innovative will have at its heart a leader who is correspondingly so. The converse is also true.

There are no such things as bad followers, only bad leaders.

This requires that leaders behave as role models at all times. A leader's behaviour will act as a licence to mimic, giving a green light for their followers to behave in a similar way.

But in an era of so many conflicting objectives and goals how does a leader decide how to behave? What is it that leaders should consider when they are about to leave that all-important contact on their teams?

Leaders need to lead to their organisation's values. To return to the investigative metaphor, a leader's prime role at an interpersonal level should be to 'police' these values. The values should cease to be just words on a poster stuck to the walls of corridors, canteens and training rooms and they should be the blueprint by which leaders behave. Failure to do so will result in the 'the do as I say not as I do syndrome.'

Role model leaders are at their most influential and persuasive when they operate at a personal level and when they take responsibility for their actions and

behaviours: This and only this gives them the right to expect the same of those they lead.

This does not mean that leaders should not possess a wide range of skills - at the strategic level and in the day to day management of an organisation they are essential – but personal leadership has to come first.

This requires that organisations will need to pay more than mere lip service to the construction of their values as well as to the appointment and development of the custodians of those values – the leaders. Their values should reflect the nature, culture and ethos of the organisation, what it stands for, what it wants to achieve and the manner in which it wishes to do so.

Once values are decided upon they should become the 'modus operandi' for everything everyone does. Leaders should then communicate, develop and nurture these values and the principle mechanism by which this occurs is their own role model behaviour. This should become an important part of the recruitment, training and development of new employees and in the essence of an organisation's leadership subsequent to that.

Finally, where necessary, if there are too many differences between the organisation's values and the employee's behaviour, then the leader should help his or her team members to find an organisation where there is a much better fit between the two.

Leadership is not about process driven models. Those that profess to give you the answer to any given leadership dilemma based on a set of situational variables that can be neatly plotted on a graph, grid or two dimensional diagram are misguided. If you ask yourself what makes a role model leader I would wager that your answer would be littered with behaviours and values and not managerial skills.

As leaders we frequently despair at the actions and behaviours of our followers. Edmond Locard would solve that crime by looking at what trace evidence had been left by the contact.

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