



A
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lead

Businesses around the world will no doubt be hoping that this year will be an improvement on the last. Here, Malcolm Follos asks what is required of leaders in today's profoundly altered business landscape, identifying what needs to change and offering twelve tips for the months ahead

There is nothing like a crisis to bring leadership to the fore; and the past year has been particularly challenging for leaders across a broad spectrum of organisations. The spotlight has been on our leaders like never before—some like flowers have blossomed and grown, whilst others like weeds have been caught out for what they really are. What is clear is that the next few years are going to be equally challenging and the leaders who will blossom are the ones who treat their organisations as organisms, not machines. They feed and water their organisation rather than stress and tune the machine.

In this article we offer twelve bits of advice gleaned from observing a new breed of leader—one which we believe will flourish and grow.

1. You are being watched and your behaviour counts

Leadership is not about 'talk, talk'—it is, and always has been, all about 'walk, walk'. Leaders have to serve as avatars of the behaviour they are seeking in others. 'Do as I say, not as I do' is all too often abundantly practised in the weed fields of the leadership park and this has to stop. The new leaders have to behave in a way that earns them the respect they need to effectively carry out their role. The cloak of leadership may at times seem invisible to the wearer but is all too visible to the watchers.

2. Beware of teams—spontaneous combustion rarely works

Some leaders seek team working as the answer to all of their problems, when in fact it is more of a reflection of their preferred style. Leaders need to identify where focused individual efforts are just fine, as distinct from areas where disciplined groups directed by a leader are ideal. They also need to preserve their adaptive energy for where real teams are actually needed to add the multiplier benefit of real collaboration. For the latter, 'structure' won't do it; genuine authentic relationships have to be built. The new breed of leader will instinctively know how to do this through authentic and radical conversations designed to strengthen relationships across a broad spectrum of personalities.

3. Get out of the bunkers—you have a limited view in there

Silos headed by powerful people defending their turf affect the value chain in all organisations and some fiefdoms are getting more entrenched as the pressure to perform builds. Leaders need to tread carefully here.



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The functionally biased performance measures do not help as they invariably institutionalise unhelpful friction and conflict. The art of creative contention requires a deft touch and the new breed of leader will know how to develop and deal with natural conflicts and direct the energy to co-create outcomes of better quality.

4. Beware 'solutions' looking for 'problems'

Many old school leaders see 'problem solving' as a prize that trumps innovation every time. They pursue 'black belt nine delta' nonsense in a way that can take over people's minds like a bad science fiction movie from the 50s. Statistical fidgeting to the 'nth degree' becomes a new bureaucracy and six sigma chain gangs (or the new fad-du-jour equivalent) are on patrol to put violators into organisational gulags. New breed leaders tailor and

craft improvement programmes that resonate with their organisation's culture and use the natural curiosity and passion to win that exists in all human beings as an energy source for change. The blind application of the latest change management 'ology' is not for them.

5. Department alert. Who is running the 'them' department?

When asked, most people admit they could do a better job than they are allowed to do at present. What stops them? The usual answer is some variation of 'them, they stop us'. I have never found a 'them' department on any organisation chart but that does not mean it doesn't exist and it does wield inordinate power. New breed leaders hunt down this elusive force and make sure its impact on positive change is muted.

6. Stop dissipating precious time and energy

There are too many meetings that take too long and are overwhelmingly focused on sharing information, the worst possible reason to have a meeting. The organisation's talent and energy are squandered internally instead of applied externally. Burn-out then happens, as in these meetings the same issues are brought up in different verbal camouflage, without being decisively tackled and confronted. The leaders' job is to recognise and treat time as their most precious asset. It is the new scarce resource as the upside of the current crisis is that money is cheap. Leaders do not treat money as the scarce resource; they know right now it isn't.

7. Listen—your business health depends on it

The one sense honed to perfection in new breed leaders is their listening. They recognise that they have two ears and only one mouth and use these attributes in the ratio they were blessed with. External perceptions of the organisation's products, services and relationships are different from the organisation's perception; and new breed leaders instinctively know this. They become an avid student of any mismatch between what is perceived and what is reported. This information, when mined properly, is a great impetus for the improvement needed to succeed in the future.

8. Get your talent focused

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In too many organisations, the reward and feedback systems are not aligned with strategic intent. They do not encourage the appropriate behaviours or discourage the inappropriate ones. Reward systems are one of the best levers for change in any organisation. Careful objective-setting which balances short term requirements with medium and long term organisational needs is a real skill. New breed leaders know that and ensure the energy of their top talent is focused on areas that really count and not dissipated across a wide range of diffuse improvement activities that do not deliver anything substantive or sustainable.

9. Planning isn't strategy, no matter what the bureaucrats say

Strategy and planning are often mistaken for each other. In 'machine' style companies, the strategic plan is 80/20 weighted towards planning and has all the strategic insight and visionary inspiration of a pre-budget statement. People need now more than ever a compelling vision of the future, one that talks to their heads AND their

hearts. The leader's job is to craft this and along with their leadership team ensure it is communicated in a way that is clear and engaging and acts as a clarion 'call to arms', helping everyone understand the 'why we are doing what we do' as well as 'what we need to do to win'.

10. Leaders: your job is to produce leaders, not just more followers

Career development and succession planning are rarely wedded. In some organisations they are not even in a relationship! As goes a leadership pipeline, to a large extent, so goes the company. New breed leaders develop, seed, mentor and proactively prepare their successors. They know the quality of the leadership pipeline is the best measure to forecast sustainability in growth and results and is a barometer for the long term health of their organisation. They know they are the temporary stewards and their real job is to leave the organisation in a better state than when they took charge.

11. Make it easier to do smart things—not harder

Einstein famously said, "It takes real genius to make things simple." Systems and processes are too often stultifying and require an insider's view and knowledge to get anything of value actually done. 'What nonsense do our systems make us do?' is a question often on the lips of the new breed leader. They attack with vigour any process that saps energy and focus, recognising life is too short for such bureaucratic nonsense!

12. Work hard, play hard and know when to take a real break

Driven, determined and workaholics, the old school leaders cough and splutter into their dotage whilst the new breed leaders recognise this is not what life is about. They work hard, play hard and take real breaks so they re-connect with the important things in life. They recognise that on their dying day there will be emails in their inbox and voicemails on their mobiles and it is unlikely their last thought will be, 'Hold on a sec, I just need to get that...!'

As this unusual decade enters its last year, many new breed leaders are beginning to consider what may happen next, what their response should be under different scenarios and what new opportunities to thrive may be right in front of them that they are not yet seeing. They ask themselves 'How can I protect confidence and gain the required energy to succeed?' These are the questions that are redefining what winning really means. ●