

## THE FIGHT FOR TRUST – The Rise Of A New Leader

We are fortunate to be living through some fascinating and challenging times. Our world views on what we expect from our leaders are being challenged and changed. Hot on the heels of the starkly exposed shortcomings of leaders in the financial sector, people in the UK have been further enraged by the impression that many of our political leaders simply lack judgement and have lost their moral compass. In short they have lost our trust and will have to fight hard to win it back.

The current daily revelations on politicians' expenses may well prove to be hugely damaging for our political system and for all organisations that create exclusive leadership clubs. But is this necessarily a bad thing? Not if you have faith in the basic integrity of people to choose leaders that they trust. We can emerge from this debacle far stronger and for authentic leaders now is the time to stand up and be counted.



It is hard not to agree with the view that the current press hysteria and hype is hugely entertaining and we had to

smile at the views expressed by comedian Frank Skinner who recently wrote in the Times: *The thing is, I know that we're supposed to be outraged because,*

*ultimately, taxes have been misused, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Oh, how they've squirmed. The truth is, it's probably the first time I've ever felt I was getting my money's worth from politicians. If we divvied out the dodgy expenses total, it would only cost each taxpayer a penny or two - a small price to pay for all that entertainment.* Ian Hislop, editor of Private Eye, clearly agreed with this sentiment, commenting that 'it is like Christmas' for the tabloids. Great news if you are a newspaper editor or a comedian, but very uncomfortable reading for politicians. And potentially this type of fall-out could affect any one of us in a leadership position.

We are on the cusp of a shift in world view regarding leadership and this shift creates a rare opportunity to build organisations that are fit for purpose and ready for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some leaders may wish this wasn't happening on their watch, but it is. And for some, the more enlightened, this presents a real opportunity to demonstrate that 'leadership is the difference that makes a difference'. The challenge for us all is to build trust - easy to say, harder to do. Trust is the key foundation stone on which authentic leaders can build a strong organisation; once damaged, it puts the whole organisation at risk - so it is clearly worth fighting for.

Trust is an innate emotion. We are born trusting, we have to be, otherwise how would we survive the first few years of our lives? It is a good policy to start with the assumption that a base level of trust is present.

The analogy we use with our clients is that it is like a bank account - we start with a small deposit in the 'Trust & Credibility Account', and then as leaders one of our key jobs is to continue to make 'deposits'; to build on this base level so that when the time comes to make a 'withdrawal' we do not go overdrawn. For example, right now one of our challenges is to find innovative and affordable ways to say 'thank you', as we ask our people to work longer and harder in these uncertain and somewhat frightening times. Now more than ever you need to take a close look at your 'thank you' tactics and remember, what you do speaks far louder than what you say!

Unfortunately the current economic situation has witnessed many leaders forced to make withdrawals from their 'T&C Account' and some have gone well into the red! This is shown by the slump in confidence



Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

We focus on areas where companies can raise the bar on performance, productivity and profit. We ensure that any work we do has clear line of sight to specific business outcomes of value to the organisation, so that a solid return on time, energy and investment is realised.

We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ...  
**'We do the really hard part of the soft stuff.'**

and productivity that follows too many badly judged cost cutting initiatives. As we discussed in previous articles there are 'good' costs, those that enhance value, and 'bad' costs, those that don't. A leader has to make a judgement using 'value' as the basis, not just cost. In short, if we don't use the current economic climates to take on and eliminate some of the deeply embedded destroyers of value in our organisation, then we will take a big hit in our 'T&C Account'. As Gordon Brown allegedly said to The Speaker, 'time to reflect' - that did the trick! So, check your own 'T&C' bank balance; don't go to the nearest ATM, the nearest mirror will do nicely!

My friend and associate John Varney puts it very well; 'Future leadership must be distinguished by the idea of authenticity. Authentic leadership is not an outward technique or show of behaviours but comes from deep within the person. The work of leadership is to evoke such authenticity throughout the organisation.' At Sensei we help leaders build authentic relationships and have authentic conversations, because we know this is the best way to ensure the future of the organisation and to make substantial deposits in the 'T&C Account'.

As a footnote I have just read as part of my research for this article that the US spend on 'Leadership Development' last year was a staggering \$40bn. Where is the return on this investment we are left to wonder? It is clearly time for a new way to develop our leaders so we have adapted our Leadership Journeys to address this very issue. If you want to know more please contact our business development manager [bwilde@senseiuke.com](mailto:bwilde@senseiuke.com).

**Malcolm Follos, June 2009**