

THE PATH TO GREATNESS

How can you become an outstanding leader? Tom Quayle explains

➤ American leadership guru Warren Bennis once defined leadership as “the capacity to translate vision into reality”. This exciting ability to shape new outcomes, together with the status and financial remuneration that come with being a leader, are reasons why many of us actively aspire to develop our leadership skills. Then there are others who don’t particularly desire to become leaders, but find that leadership is thrust upon them nevertheless. Whether you’ve actively hankered after a leadership role or not, what is indisputable is that it will be extremely difficult for you to progress in your treasury career unless you develop and hone your leadership skills. And if you’re

going to be a leader, you may as well aim to be the very best.

So what makes a great leader?

Great leaders find talent

To succeed, businesses rely on a pool of capable individuals to produce, sell and support their goods and services. In order to create an environment where skilled people flourish, leaders need to treat ‘talent finding’ as a science. Great leaders have to have a clear articulation of ‘what good looks like’ as it pertains to their own team or company. A ‘people formula’ can help to identify low, mid and high achievers to make sure performance issues are dealt with swiftly. A clear map of team goals and

responsibilities is vital to the development of a team that performs at its optimum level.

Great leaders think ahead

Great leaders create space to imagine the future. They make time to think, to plan, to set the future direction, to create visions and to communicate them. Future proofing should be a constant focus, not simply something that is done at the beginning of the year or at the start of a quarter. Against this backdrop, high-performing leaders constantly assess their own performance, as well as that of their teams, using clear metrics. This ensures that progress is documented, reviewed and, most of all, encouraged.

Great leaders know that time is precious

Great leaders understand optimum functionality. Functionality is ‘where you spend your time’. A leader’s time is precious, but unfortunately, most waste their energy being dragged into meetings that don’t add value, needlessly reporting figures simply because it’s process and, most annoyingly of all, fighting off useless emails. Great leaders quickly isolate the activities they need to focus on in order to fulfil the purpose of their role, and they are constantly conscious of how they are doing against this.

Great leaders nurture teams

Ultimately, nurturing skills and talent within a team or a company comes down to one simple thing: conversations. What types of conversations are you having with your people, and how often are you having them? There you have it, two simple metrics: ‘what type’ and ‘how often’.

Most of us understand the value of a great conversation because we’ve had lots

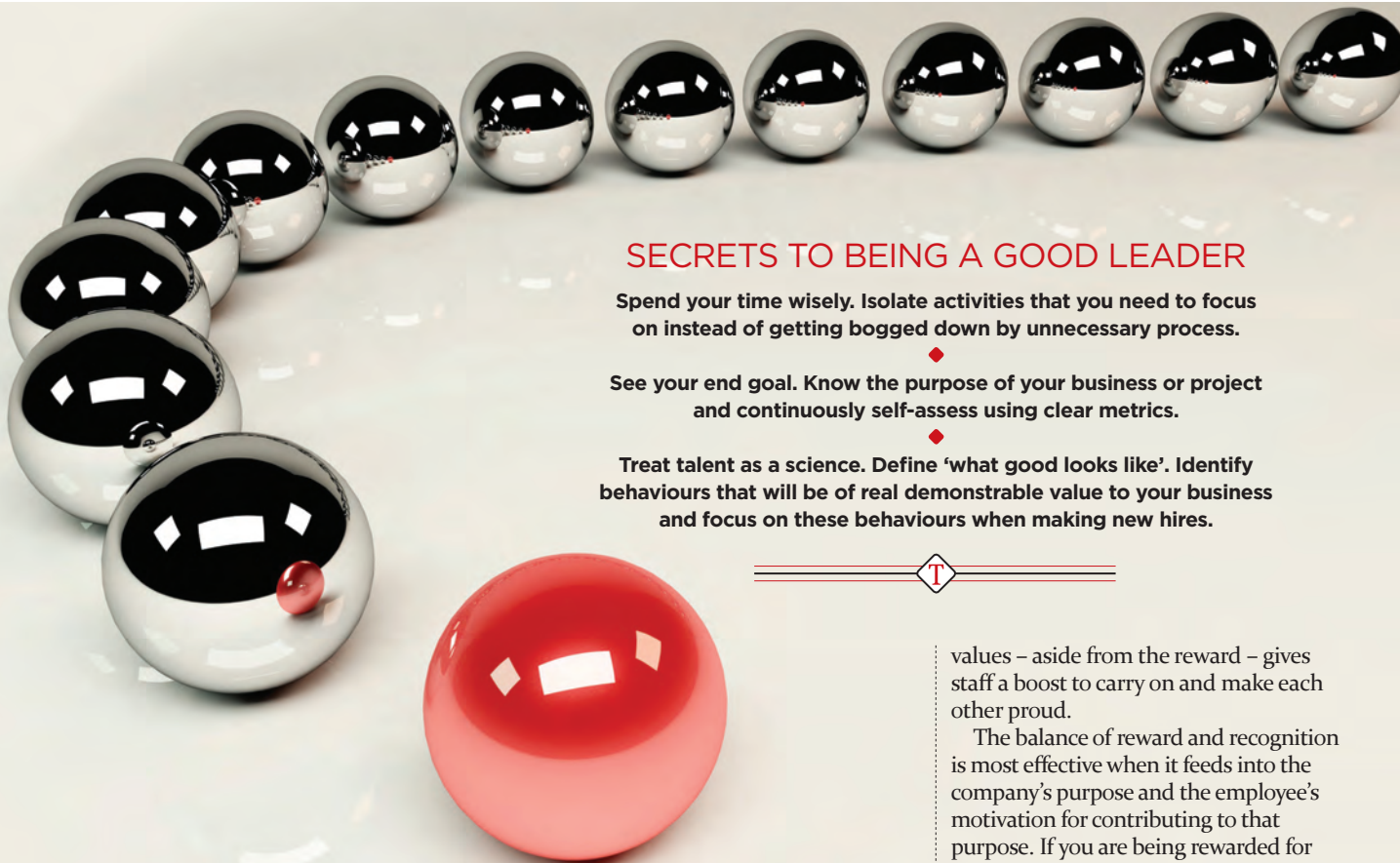
COACHING VS LEADERSHIP

There is a problem with learning and development when it comes to leadership in businesses today. The tag ‘coach’ has been floated around, shaped, manipulated and mangled into a number of different fashions, and has often been positioned as the key to ‘being a better leader’. The truth is, no one knows what ‘being a better leader’ really means. And, more pressingly, no one knows quite how it makes them succeed at work.

Here’s the disconnect. Your job as a leader is to improve the performance of your team, area, business unit – basically, whatever function or group of people you happen to be ‘leading’. Somewhere along the line, the contention that ‘coaching’ needs to be one of your core skills in order to do your job has squeezed its way onto most competency frameworks and training courses.

But coaching is a stretch too far for most business leaders to practically demonstrate in their jobs today. Coaching is associated with qualifications, with expertise. The expectation is that somehow you need to be qualified to be a ‘coach’ or go through a certain amount of training.

So, the term ‘coaching’ needs to be stripped back because inherently there is some value in what ‘coaching’ often aims to achieve. It is essentially a way to fundamentally shift the performance of a team or business unit and to create an environment where skills are grown, where emotions are tapped into, and where progress is encouraged, documented and reviewed. Once ‘coaching’ has been stripped to these clear purposes, it becomes easier to understand how good leadership is underpinned by these intentions.



SECRETS TO BEING A GOOD LEADER

Spend your time wisely. Isolate activities that you need to focus on instead of getting bogged down by unnecessary process.



See your end goal. Know the purpose of your business or project and continuously self-assess using clear metrics.



Treat talent as a science. Define 'what good looks like'. Identify behaviours that will be of real demonstrable value to your business and focus on these behaviours when making new hires.



of them in our lifetimes. So we can refer to them in a concrete way and understand their impact.

The Chemistry Group introduced a conversations tool to a FTSE 100 business with the ultimate goal of growing talent and, ultimately, increasing profit. The implementation of the tool demonstrated that having different conversations increased employee engagement in the business, and dramatically improved customer service ratings due to increased capability across the customer service teams.

➤ We got the company's leaders to measure the outputs of their conversations with individuals using the following scales:

- ◆ How much did I self-disclose? (This creates an environment of trust.)
- ◆ How much did I learn about them? (This creates understanding and engagement.)
- ◆ Was there clear evidence of progress from the previous conversation? (This drives continuous improvement.)
- ◆ How much did I talk versus how much did they talk?

We measured the following for their teams as a whole:

- ◆ How much am I at my desk versus out with the team this week? (This encourages interpersonal interaction and allows leaders to have a finger on the pulse.)

- ◆ How many people have I connected with this week? (This stimulates conversations and learning.)

- ◆ How many difficult conversations have I had this week? (Encourages leaders to challenge and take action.)

- ◆ How many opportunities have I created for people to 'level up' this week? (Teams were being measured on a capability framework, and leaders were encouraged to actively create challenges to test their people, or 'level up' against the framework.)

Great leaders set the right tone

The importance of a company's culture cannot be overstated. It is a key indicator of team productivity, performance and staff retention levels. Culture is simple: it's why the business exists (its beliefs) and the way the business does things (its behaviours). Having a desirable business 'brand' relies on having a distinct culture, which in turn relies on having a set of values that people can be measured against and rewarded for, in the right way.

Of course, the 'right way' depends on the culture of the business and the shared motivations of the employees. Benefits both reward and reinforce the culture. And this matters, because if you get this right, then not only will staff stay and grow, but productivity and team morale will also be boosted. Being recognised for living the

values – aside from the reward – gives staff a boost to carry on and make each other proud.

The balance of reward and recognition is most effective when it feeds into the company's purpose and the employee's motivation for contributing to that purpose. If you are being rewarded for something you don't believe in, it's unlikely to feel good and therefore you're unlikely to stay. Likewise, if you're rewarded with something that doesn't motivate you, then similarly the impact and meaning is lost. Companies that value conversations tend to get this right.

The culture of a business needs to be demonstrated from the top down. So this is where great leaders come into play. Leaders get to define and foster the culture by rewarding brilliant behaviour appropriately.

Focus on tomorrow

In order to make a difference, we need to focus on the activities that create most value in our role. In the case of a leader, this means making time for tomorrow-based activities – development, planning, vision setting, etc. Concepts and theories on coaching, and other learning and development fads, aren't helpful. We need to bring leadership back to its core in a concrete, simple and actionable way. The point being, knowledge is not behaviour, especially when it comes to leaders. ♦



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