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LEADERS NOT BOSSES

Rajeev Peshawaria, CEO of the Iclif Leadership & Governance Centre in Malaysia, draws from an extensive history in leadership development to reveal the building blocks that make for genuine leadership in an organisation.

The one thing we've learnt is that artificial methods, policies, practices of succession planning and high potential leader identification don't work. They tend to misfire. In today's day and age, it's very difficult to tell who will be a high performing person in five years because the world will change at least five times in five years. That's how quickly technology is changing the world today. So who are we to anoint the high-performing person of tomorrow?

Every year, 80 billion dollars are spent around the world on leadership programmes and yet the corporate and political world reports a grave shortage of real leaders. What's the problem? Why is that not working? Several reasons: First, I believe that most academic models that such programmes are made up of look good in the classroom, but do not have much relevance in real life. Another issue is that we tend to equate leadership to a position of power. Being a big boss with a title like CEO does not make someone a leader – what she envisions for the future, and what she does about it does. Next, the way we've been looking at leadership development all along it is flawed. We try to teach leadership through competency models, psychometric personality assessments, role plays that encourage copying famous leaders' behavior. Since when did copying become an act of leadership? Finally, the biggest misconception is what a lot of people still believe – that leadership has something to do with heredity – you are either born a leader or not.

Disillusioned with the state of the art in leadership development, we at the Iclif Leadership & Governance Centre started looking for a different approach. A quick look at some of the best leaders in history provided the first insight: Effective leadership has nothing to do with the biological phenomenon of human birth. In other words, leaders are definitely made, not born. A leader in you is born when two things happen simultaneously; one – you feel deeply about the inadequacies of current reality, meaning something bothers you so much that you cannot sleep and, two, you decide to do something about it. And usually these

MAN OF THE MOMENT
As the world moves into 2014, the issue of human resource and cultivation of leaders is once again making the life of CEOs very interesting. Rajeev Peshawaria, CEO of the Iclif Leadership & Governance Centre and author of *Too Many Bosses, Too Few Leaders*, is a man who has explored the issue of leadership deeply. Having lived in 14 cities in eight countries, his pedigree includes many years at American Express and Goldman Sachs, and being the Chief Learning Officer at both Coca-Cola and Morgan Stanley. At Goldman Sachs, he helped found Pine Street – the firm's acclaimed leadership academy – and headed Pine Street for Europe and Asia. He has provided coaching, consulting and advisory services globally. He talks to *The Peak* about what great leadership is really made up of, and the latest discoveries about leadership that – as it turns out – we knew all along.

two things happen much later after biological birth. Your intentions and actions to struggle for a better future make you a leader. A commander is someone who simply gives commands; a leader takes you to a better future.

Now, if you start thinking about leadership in terms of creating a better future, you have a big problem. The moment you share the picture of the better future you have in mind with others, all you get is resistance. People say, "don't do it, let me give you some friendly advice." So the moment you decide you want to create a better future, your constant companion is resistance, both big and small. What you need in order to fight that resistance and keep going, is a ton of emotional energy. The biggest difference between leaders and non-leaders is this – non-leaders give up in the face of resistance. Recently, the world lost one of the greatest leaders alive – Nelson Mandela. Even after 27 years of wrongful imprisonment, he never gave up on his dream of creating the Rainbow Nation. Or consider Gandhi who got stronger every time he was jailed or beaten. What keeps such people going? They manage to tap into some unusual and deep sources of human energy.

What we found is that there are three sources of such energy. The first two are clarity of purpose and clarity of values. The moment you can imagine a better future, every time you close your eyes and visualize it, you become energized. Next, is having a set of moral values to tell you what to do when the going gets really tough. By definition, leadership is about creating a future that doesn't yet exist. So leaders go into uncharted territory, and rely on their values to guide them in the absence of pre-set solutions or proven formulas.

Often, we come across a third source of energy which an increasingly large number of leaders are able to tap into, and that is the ability to harness the power of their own minds. What does this mean? Well, eastern metaphysical philosophy including Sufism, Buddhism, and Hinduism always believed that the universe is connected. We are made of the same matter and are

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connected, from table to chair to person. In the modern day, this eastern understanding got buried under self-focussed materiality and Newtonian physics. Newton's model of physics became the way to interpret the world. But now, recent advances in neuroscience and quantum physics are proving that the Asian philosophies were actually right all along. If you look under a microscope, quantum physics is saying that the table, chair and the human is actually made of the same molecules and they are connected (at least at the sub-atomic level).

But are human beings also connected to one another? With the recent discovery of mirror neurons in the brain, neuroscience now says yes. Mirror neurons are a subset of our motor command neurons. Motor command neurons enable us to perform daily actions like lifting a glass of water or grabbing an apple. We know this because each time we perform such an action, our motor command neurons fire up – and this can be measured through an MRI scanning machine placed on one's head. A subset of these motor command neurons (the mirror neurons) fire even as a person watches another person perform the action. In other words, the brain thinks we are performing the action even though we are simply watching another person do so. This is why our bodies tense up when we watch a very intense game of football. The mirror neurons communicate between you and the players so you feel like you're the one kicking the ball. Herein lies the proof that humans are connected to one another in ways more profound than those enabled by the internet.

So with this understanding of universal connectedness, it is now emerging that the human mind has the ability to impact our own body to heal, and perform better. The same western science that once rejected eastern philosophies, it is now proving that the mind might even have the ability to influence matter. Now imagine if you had the three sources of energy; clarity of purpose, values and the ability to use the power of the mind to influence your own body, other people and physical reality. How would you behave with other people? How would you behave with the world at large around you? While we are still at the early stages of rediscovering what Eastern Metaphysics knew all along, it is becoming increasingly clear that many great leaders understand this and are able to use the power of their minds.

Coming back to what is wrong with today's leadership and talent development practices, let us just take a couple of examples – Succession Planning and Innovation. Most companies select their high-potential future leaders early in their career, and give them a special development diet so that they can be groomed. They also isolate innovation in R&D labs and incubators. Such practices miss a key point: in a fast changing environment, how can we tell today who will succeed tomorrow? And how can we be sure that the ones we confine to innovation labs are the ones who will indeed come up with new ideas? Instead of confining innovation to the labs and incubators, I say unleash innovation within the whole company. If you have 50,000 people working for you, chances are that 100 or 1,000 of them have great ideas. You simply cannot tell who they are. Open it up instead of making it elitist and don't bring in the consultants.

I worked for American Express for many years and for a long time, customers would call into our 1-800 number to complain. From the hundreds of thousands of calls every day, those customer contacts ended up with good service being provided and that was it. So an idea came from the frontline staff where they could look at the customer screen and, at the end of the conversation, offer a related product that could be good for the customer. That idea ended up generating millions and millions of sales from what would otherwise be customer calls that went nowhere.

When you anoint people as high potential and say you'll be giving them extra development programs and special projects, they don't always appreciate it because they're already swamped. By opening up innovation to everyone, you're giving the people who want to shine the chance in what I call natural succession planning. They get to form a team, present their idea at a country or even global level and it's really their own motivation that comes to the fore. Companies get to identify leaders without spending money and the board gets to see the talent pool. All you need to do is to provide an open invitation to the whole organization and ask if anyone has an idea that can increase the company's top or bottom line, or any other form of efficiency. In one stroke, you take care of both innovation and succession planning. Let the cream rise to the top, naturally! ☺