# WOULD I WORK FOR ME – EXPLORING THE ESSENCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

*By Debbie Craig & John Gatherer*

*"Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers. We are tired of leaders we fear, tired of leaders we love, and tired of leaders who let us take liberties with them. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away."*
*~ Admiral James B. Stockdale*

## Introduction

Leaders are always under scrutiny. They are constantly watched, talked about in the corridors and discussed with friends and colleagues. Their cues and signals are dissected, analysed and labelled. Their style and approach to managing people are continuously under the spotlight. The adage "people leave bosses, they don't leave organizations" attests to the huge influence and impact that a leader has on members of his/her team. The great leaders leave a legacy of inspiration, huge respect and a stimulating and meaningful work environment. They also have a strong focus on delivering results, motivating and empowering a professional team and having a genuine interest in career development and personal growth.

However, the reality of organizational life is that not only is the converse true, but even more evident! The dysfunctional leaders are operating across all structures and are found in every organization - the boss with derailing behaviours, the autocrat, the super-egotist, the cynic, the sceptic, the "my way or highway" advocate – they're alive and well and sometimes flourishing….! If you were a fly on the wall to your employee's secret thoughts, views and corridor conversations, would you like what you hear? How accurate is your perception of yourself as a leader compared to the perception of others? How often do you encourage candid feedback from your team members? Essentially…**Would you want to work for you?**

The most common finding when we do reality testing through global leadership development programs and multi-rater assessments across client assignments, is that most leaders have a higher perception of themselves than others. This is especially true if they have not been exposed to leadership or team feedback before. A smaller percentage rate themselves lower that others, usually indicating a lower self-esteem. What we ideally look for are those that have a pretty close match of

their internal perception of their leadership competence and behaviours with external perceptions and truly understand, accept and work with their strengths and weaknesses.

- What is it in our upbringing and in our development that leads to this perception gap?

- Why is leadership so difficult to get right, and attract so much criticism?

- How do we assist leaders with awareness, insight and tools for continuously building their leadership effectiveness?

- How do I become the ideal boss?

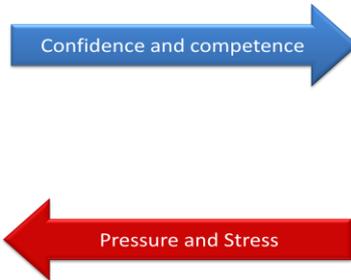**From Dysfunctional to Good to Great**

A workshop activity that we have often facilitated in leadership programs includes participants reflecting on the characteristics of dysfunctional, good and great leaders. We ask them for the differentiators and to think of people that they know that fit into each of the categories. A typical example is shown below:

| Dysfunctional | Good | Great |
|---|---|---|
| - Arrogant | - Confident | - Visionary |
| - Poor communications | - Good communicator | - Inspirational |
| - Over ambitious | - Ambitious | - Realistic |
| - Stubborn | - Flexible | - Adaptable |
| - Defensive | - Accepts constructive criticism | - Applies behaviour change |
| - Not listening | - Good listener | - Empathetic |
| - Resistance to change | - Open to new ideas | - Dynamic |
| - Indecisive | - Decisive | - Goal orientated / future focused |
| - Double standards / ethics | - Ethical | - Leads by example |
| - Non-caring | - Considerate | - Supportive and empowering |
| - Not setting a target | - Sets challenging targets | - Continuously raises the bar |
| - Non collaborative | - Collaborative | - Coaching / mentoring |

The area that they struggle with the most is the difference between good and great leaders, with true great leaders in their own companies few and far between. The most familiar category and the one that generates the most laughs and groans is the dysfunctional area, where numerous examples are cited. This is the arena of the macho personalities, mavericks, dominators and controllers as well as the pleasers, passive-aggressives, nay-sayers and apathetic characters that impact the lives of employees blissfully unaware of their demotivating leadership style.

We believe that these characteristics across the continuum of leadership effectiveness are distinctly evident in organizations across the world. We have been involved with leadership development programmes in Africa, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South East Asia and China and the need to build leadership capability remains one of the major strategic challenges wherever we've worked. Whilst the regional cultures and even sub-cultures are different, the cultures around leadership are very similar with the same themes and imperatives for change arising in all the different regions.

We use the following continuum to assist leaders reflect on some of their tendencies under pressure and stress. We also do peer reviews where groups discuss their personal reflections (top 3 on each list) and offer feedback to validate or add additional behaviours to each other's lists.

| Dysfunctional Behaviour | | Effective Behaviour |
|---|---|---|
| Egocentric/self-absorbed | | Self-awareness |
| Submissive/withdrawn | | Assertiveness |
| Self-conscious/foolish/clumsy | | Self-regard/confidence |
| Stressed/highly strung | Confidence and competence → | Stress tolerance |
| Reactive/explosive | | Impulse control |
| Sense of failure | | Self-actualisation |
| Dependence | | Independence |
| Conflictual or withdrawal | | Inter personal relations |
| Insensitive/aloof | ← Pressure and Stress | Empathy |
| Selfish/couldn't care | | Social responsibility |
| Resistance to change | | Adaptability |
| Disorganised, confused, stuck | | Problem solving |
| Out of line with others perceptions | | Reality testing |
| Rigid | | Flexibility |

## What competencies do leaders need?

When initiating a leadership development program, we like to start with understanding the current perceptions of organisational performance, culture, team-effectiveness and leadership styles and behaviours. One of the questions we ask in our diagnostic interviews is: what is the profile of a future leader in this organisation? We then synthesize the perceptions, combined with best practice competency studies, into a leadership competency profile. Once again, many common themes emerge across the globe into a competency framework that is universally applicable and holds relevance in many diverse organisations, requiring only minor tweaks on terminology or focus areas.

The 4 key areas of leadership effectiveness is the ability to

- think and understand (strategic context and alignment)

- talk and listen (engagement and dialogue)

- act and learn (enablement and accountability) and

- get results (personal effectiveness)

Each of these areas contain competencies and behavioural descriptors for self-evaluation and/or multi-rater feedback. See example below.

| Competency | Description |
|---|---|
| **Strategic Context and Alignment** <br> Understanding the big picture through conceptual and strategic thinking and problem solving and aligning all stakeholders toward achieving the vision and strategic objectives | |
| **Visionary and strategic direction** | <ul><li>Creates and communicates a compelling vision which inspires others to follow</li><li>Formulates strategies and directs teams to achieve future business objectives</li><li>Takes account of external environment and adapts strategies where required</li><li>Leads by example and demonstrates credible, visible leadership</li><li>Actively looks for synergies within global business whilst applying local wisdom to realise value locally - thinks global, acts local</li></ul> |
| **Conceptual Thinking** | <ul><li>Thinks in a systemic way with the "big picture" in mind and is able to clarify complex situations for others</li><li>Identifies patterns or connections within or between situations and spots the core issues in complex data or situations.</li><li>Navigates through complex situations to define a clear way forward or solution</li><li>The ability to see broader issues, implications and trends and integrate into the creation of a clear strategic vision which is then communicated effectively</li><li>Makes sound business decisions and balances time and quality of decisions based on priorities and impact</li></ul> |
| **Creative Problem Solving & Innovation** | <ul><li>Generates and adapts creative ideas and innovative solutions to business challenges</li><li>Uses rigorous problem solving methods (data gathering, analysis, logic, assumption testing) to find root causes and solve difficult problem</li><li>Creates opportunities or overcomes obstacles by redefining and rethinking issues differently - thinks "outside the box</li><li>Actively seeks to continuously improve the way things are done</li></ul> |
| **Customer & Relationship Management** | <ul><li>Quickly understands and establishes key relationships to the business and gains their trust and respect</li><li>Focuses on and builds key customer relationships to ensure future value for the business</li><li>Applies networking skills to build and maintain key relationships</li><li>Establishes ongoing exchange of information with key people</li><li>Influences the real decision makers at political, organizational and personal levels</li><li>Anticipates expectations, aligns expectations with business objectives and negotiates effectively</li></ul> |

**Reality Check**

We use the diagnostic interviews and this framework as a basis for developing our leadership programs. Another core tool is a multi-rater feedback of the competencies. Although there is some controversy on the usefulness and accuracy of multi-rater feedback, our most common feedback is "I wish I had got this feedback years ago, it has really opened my eyes, I now know what to concentrate on". You will get the few ego-centric individuals who may try to hunt down and attack their assessors, but this is really a very small percentage and worth the risk of most leaders building awareness and motivation to improve their leadership effectiveness in the eyes of their employees, colleagues and managers. It is also important to do multi-rater feedback in the context of leadership development, with no direct job or reward consequences, for a more honest and less fear-based assessment, and to encourage in-the-moment coaching discussions of results, surprises, feelings and possible development actions. Our most effective and empowering sessions occur when the senior leadership team attends the program together and works on not just leadership issues, but also team effectiveness and alignment and understands the impact of leadership on strategy, performance and organisational culture.  Another important element of these programs is to ensure all raters are fully briefed, preferably face-to-face, on the importance of the feedback, the honesty required and how it will be used, and a contact person for assistance where required.

**Example of multi-rater feedback**



**Developing leaders**

The pre-requisites for real learning to take place is

- awareness,

- insight,

- willingness,

- action

If any of these are missing, learning will be at best slow, at worst non-existent. Awareness and insight is created through a combination of sharing information on transformational leadership characteristics (the dysfunctional, good and great aspects), self-reflection, multi-rater feedback, group discussions and feedback and individual coaching. If the willingness to continuously learn and grow is not inherent

in an individual, then leaders need to put the pressure on to ensure there are consequences for ineffective leadership behaviours. This can be hard work and that is why many leaders agree with the statement: "hire for attitude, train for skill". We have seen this approach work though.

Taking action requires a plan and support. Personal development plans are drawn up early in the program and discussed with peers to ensure a good mix of interventions, coaching and on-the-job experience.

A typical in-house Leadership Development Program includes core and elective modules.

**Core modules**

- Self-mastery
- Team mastery
- Change mastery
- Leadership and business mastery

**Elective modules**

- Coaching
- Crucial conversations
- Emotional intelligence
- Influence and impact
- etc

For a select group of high potentials, these programs can be supplemented with **business school programs** for business management skills.

Another lower cost option for high potentials is to offer them real life project experience whilst they learn and develop. This is called **business driven action learning** and must contain senior management commitment, time off their jobs to work on strategic projects, a definite ROI for the project and good coaches and facilitators of the program.

These module topics and options will be explored in more detail in this series of leadership articles.

☙

**SOURCES:** Collins, J. 2001. *Good to great.* New York: Harper Collins.; Gatherer, J and Craig, D. 2010. *I am Talent*: Knowres Publishing, Randburg, South Africa; de Vries, M.F.R. *The Leadership Mystique* UK: FT Prentice Hall

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**DEBBIE CRAIG**

Debbie has over 18 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, China, South America and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company with her business partner, John Gatherer.

Debbie has published a book, "I am Talent", on optimising potential and career aspirations, has written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows and presented at conferences.



**JOHN GATHERER**

John has over 38 years' experience in the fields of HR, labour relations, training and development, leadership and strategic change management, having held senior and executive positions in Anglo American plc. and the De Beers Groups. John joined Debbie Craig at Catalyst Consulting as Principal Consultant, specialising in strategic change, leadership development, talent management and executive coaching, working locally and internationally. John brings a deep and practical knowledge and expertise to his roles as facilitator, consultant and organization development specialist as well his ability to think strategically and design innovative solutions. John has managed large scale people management projects and transformation journeys in Africa, Asia, China, the UK, India, Kuwait, Australia and the USA.

John has co-authored a book, "I am Talent" with Debbie Craig, on optimising potential and career aspirations, has written numerous journal articles and contributing chapters to Management education publications and presented at conferences and workshops. John's other passions include photography and travel and he has written and published a number of photographic "coffee table" books on African Wildlife and Adventure Travel.

www.catalystconsulting.co.za