

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

How many decisions does a leader make in an hour? I read that a Red Arrows lead pilot has a decision to make every 20 seconds. That's one person who knows for sure that his team follows with unflinching confidence in their boss's ability – there's no room for poor judgement when flying in close formation at 400mph. Trust, respect and confidence in this team leader's skill are absolute prerequisites. On the ground, however, staff can find it hard to trust leaders who insist on flying by the seat of their pants.

The way a boss leads others has a direct impact on the 'health' of those around them, and the wider organisation. Few things breed cynicism as effectively as a perceived double standard, while leaders with integrity can inspire the indifferent and command respect from the obstructionist.

Leadership by example is important because people tend to follow tones set by others. People in authority send messages about what is and isn't important. These then filter down through an organisation as the standards by which people calibrate their own behaviour. How you behave as a leader sets the tone



As a leader, it's not just what you do, but the way that you do it. **Lyn Bicker** calls on managers to inspire some enthusiasm by setting staff a good example

for focus, dedication and even urgency across the entire team. There is a big difference between just getting the job done and getting it done in the right manner.

You can't expect people to respond to your business wants with verve and commitment if you are perceived as a faceless leader who doesn't effectively communicate, direct and reassure. Going through the motions just doesn't cut it. By contrast, enthusiasm and enjoyment can be highly contagious. Whenever I find a team with a real sense of shared purpose and understated intensity, focused leadership is never far away.

BACK TO BASICS

Managers are the perfect people to set good examples because they know the business objectives and what needs to happen. People see their bosses strive for excellence and emulate their behaviour. A key facet of 'do what I do, not what I say' is a leader's ability to listen. At a time when employees across all sectors increasingly want and expect to have a voice, bosses who listen, rather than tell, can have a tangible effect on company performance.

This back-to-basics approach to getting to the heart of an organisation certainly works for ten of the top 20 companies in this year's *Sunday Times 100 Best Companies To Work For* survey.

Among those employees who said their bosses do a lot of telling and little listening, only half agreed they have confidence in the leadership skills of senior management. That figure nearly doubled among staff who felt they are actually listened to.

The first step towards achieving a culture of good leadership is recognising that the process of managing an organisation's vision, direction and control affects the relationships between leaders and followers at all levels, not just at the top. It demands an obvious and consistent approach to leadership and its development that is related directly to the culture and business goals of the organisation.

A leadership model provides a workable framework for this. One particularly effective model I work with is designed to help managers understand leadership in the context of their organisation, to make explicit links between good leadership and achieving objectives, and to establish a structure for performance and development discussions between individuals and their managers.

To help people achieve these goals, organisations need to find role models for excellent leadership. The top teams need to set staff positive examples by consistently linking organisational values with everyday actions. Even after the initial goals are reached, the process is ongoing, with continuing dialogue between leaders and their teams on what leadership really means to the organisation.

Laying the foundations for consistently good leadership is vital, but let's not forget the characteristics that make excellent leaders human: passion, energy and instinct. These are equally important traits. Because while the leader of the Red Arrows will draw on a combination of technical skill and leadership ability to bring his team safely home, you can be sure he'll be doing so with a glint in his eye. ■

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Leaders who listen are more likely to inspire confidence in their colleagues