



Society of Leadership Fellows,
St George's House

Nurturing Wisdom

Insights from Leadership Fellows

Volume

3

August 2018

3 Introduction

Volume 3 of Nurturing Wisdom brings together the Insights reports inspired by six Leadership Conversations convened by the Society of Leadership Fellows at St George's House, Windsor Castle between March and July 2018.

We are immensely grateful to those Fellows who joined these Conversations (numbers 16 to 21 in our series) and shared the insights captured in the pages that follow.

We are excited by the extent to which levels of trust and openness - already very high – continue to increase as this series develops. As a result, it has become that much easier to tackle themes such as authenticity in leadership because of the ways in which we can each be truly authentic with each other in the “safe space” offered by the Vicars' Hall and St George's House itself.

We are also all getting better at offering generous spirited challenge to each other – and receiving challenge from others in that spirit, too, without feeling that we have to become in any way defensive!

The Chapter headings on the next two pages are hyperlinked, so that Leadership Fellows can quickly dip into any part of the document and draw on it to support you in your ongoing development as leaders.

We are delighted by the number of Fellows who now share these Nurturing Wisdom reports with your teams, and hope that their impact will continue to radiate outwards.

Pete Ashby
Director
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August 2018

Executive Summary

Each of the six Chapters below starts by capturing the key insights that Leadership Fellows gained through that particular Conversation.

Please just click on the heading to take you straight to the Chapter of your choice.

I Leading with integrity

This Chapter forms the backdrop for our second Annual Gathering for Leadership Fellows on September 11th 2018 and follow-up one-day Conversation on Wednesday the 12th.

At its heart is the proposition that we should differentiate between personal integrity and organisational values, since integrity can only be possessed by individuals and can not be transferred to organisations. This and other stand-out propositions reflect the fact that this was one of the most compelling and challenging themes that we have taken on at a Leadership Conversation.

2 Being more authentic as leaders

Draws on the main themes of a fascinating overnight Conversation on this topic. We recognised that a discussion about our authenticity as leaders is one that would benefit many leadership teams, which is why we have structured the report around 10 questions that could provide the basis for such a discussion.

As usual, we start off with a number of propositions that capture some of the thought-provoking insights from Leadership Fellows involved in this Conversation.

3 From good to exceptional

Draws on the main themes of a two-night Leadership Conversation on the process of moving from good to exceptional as a leader.

The Chapter then sets out eleven of the key qualities exhibited by exceptional leaders. Its overall message is that the process of moving from good to exceptional is “a constant state of movement rather than a state of being”. Among the 11 exceptional qualities, the first one is “seeking out the diamond in the rough”.

Executive Summary

4 Driving up Board performance

Starts off by capturing seven insights arising from this Conversation and then goes on to outline seven actions that Chairs and CEOs – and all Directors – can take to drive up Board performance.

Some of these ideas are quite radical: such as transforming the induction process for NEDs, ensuring that there are consequences for NEDs who choose to remain silent during meetings and always changing the agenda in some way to deter predictable behaviours and “stop the train”.

5 Rethinking our approach towards challenging conversations

This Chapter deals with one of the biggest single challenges that we all face as leaders: how to open up a conversation where we have a difficult message to convey.

It suggests how the principles that we use for our Leadership Conversations – trust, connect and stretch – could help with framing these challenging conversations. After capturing the key elements of this approach in a one-page summary, it explains them before bringing them to life through six specific moments in challenging conversations.

6 Rebalancing our lives as leaders

In one of our most inspirational Conversations yet we engaged with the question, “What would a better version of me look like in three years time?”. We quickly came to the view that many of us massively over-invest in our working lives as leaders. We developed the idea of colour-coding all of our lives to achieve a new work-life balance as leaders.

For those of us involved in this Conversation, life will never quite be the same again. If the challenge in this final Chapter of Volume 3 resonates with you, you will know why!

CHAPTER I



Insights from Leadership Fellows

Leading with Integrity

June 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

Three stand-out propositions

1 We should differentiate between personal integrity and organisational values, because:

- i** Integrity can only be possessed by individuals and can NOT be transferred to organisations
- ii** Organisations adopt and own **values** that enable them to act with integrity. They can never “own” integrity because that is ours, and ours alone.

2 Organisations are right to insist that “when we walk through their gates, we should adopt their values”.

- i** Organisations are absolutely within their rights to insist that when we are working for them at any level, including that of CEO, we do so within their existing values framework.
- ii** If we find ourselves unable to reconcile our personal integrity with the values of the organisation, we have two options: to persuade the organisation to change its values, or accept that we are working for the wrong organisation - and leave.

3 Our commitment to acting with integrity should never free us from considering the likely impact of our actions on others.

- i** Integrity is not just about intention, it is also about impact – and if our behaviours have a negative impact on others we should judge ourselves harshly for that.
- ii** If we “roll the dice”, we’re responsible for where they land.

Guide to these Insights

<i>Page</i>	<i>Themes</i>
7	Leading with integrity – what does it mean to you?
8	Integrity and consistency
9	Compromising our integrity
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12	Integrity and “pressing the pause button”
13	Integrity and empowerment
14	Integrity and vulnerability
15	Integrity, trust and culture change
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19	My word is MY bond
20	“Corporate integrity” – a step too far
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23	“Don’t put down your own moral compass”

Leading with integrity – *what does it mean to you?*

We all tend to use different language to describe what leading with integrity means to us:

- “Doing the right thing when no-one is looking”
- “Doing the right thing, even when it’s really hard to do – and is not to my advantage”
- “Being my best self”
- “Remaining true to my purpose”
- “Being prepared to step into the ring and say no”
- “Being prepared to say ‘Yes we can’ and then asking ‘But should we?’”
- “Never missing the opportunity to stand up and say, ‘This is what I value - and let me tell you **why**’”.

Doing
the right
thing

Integrity and consistency

We often talk about leaders with integrity being seen to be “consistent”. What do we mean by this?

- We **don't** mean consistency in terms of what they **do**, or what they want others to do
- We generally mean consistency in terms of the process of **internal** reflection that they go through before they take an important decision
- We know that they will ask themselves whether the decision can be **justified**, not just in a business sense but in a broader social and moral sense too
- We know that they need to be satisfied with the reasoning behind their decisions, as well as their **likely impact**, before pressing the green button
- We see their consistency as driven by their need to "**do the right thing**" as much as they can.

Hence the consistency of their **struggle** with all of the uncertainties and dilemmas when they ask themselves a question and quickly see that there is no single right answer.

Integrity +

Compromising our integrity

Do we ever compromise our integrity as leaders? Some have difficulty with this concept, whilst most of us accept this is unavoidable.

Occasionally compromising our integrity is “part of our humanity”.

“Forgivable”

Some compromises are forgivable – e.g. telling a newly appointed Director who is a very nervous public speaker that his first presentation to the Board went down well, even though it was excruciating in parts.

Other compromises are a step too far – e.g. advising your Board that a certain decision would pose little risk for the business even though your Chief Finance Officer told you hours beforehand that she was seriously concerned about the likely financial consequences.

- In seeking to lead with integrity, we need to be careful to differentiate between compromises that are forgivable and those that are simply unacceptable.

Sharing the dilemmas

We know that the process of trying to avoid compromising our integrity involves us having to weigh up all sorts of possible dilemmas and then make a considered judgment call.

In modelling high integrity leadership, we should share some of these dilemmas more with close colleagues.

We don't serve anyone by pretending that decisions are any easier – and less risky – than we know them to be.

Avoiding
compromises

Integrity and courage

So what is the best way to avoid compromising our integrity as much as possible?

In answering this question, one word comes up more often than any other: courage.

We need to show:

- The courage of our convictions
- The courage to do what we believe to be right, even though it might not do us any favours in a business sense
- The courage to pause sometimes, too, and make a point of asking the advice of a number of people who are likely to have different opinions, before we take a firm decision
- The courage to be able to say a recent decision of ours was almost certainly **wrong**, and we need to change tack – quickly!

“Quiet integrity”

In this sort of situation, we might well need to draw on our courage to handle the charge that we have been “inconsistent”.

So long as we know that we have been **consistent in trying to stand in our integrity**, there is no need to rise to the challenge.

Our integrity is even stronger when we don't feel that we have to shout about it.

- “Quiet integrity” has so much more to commend it than integrity that is in any way brash or egotistical.

Integrity +

Integrity and “holding the discomfort”

There is another challenge associated with integrity that can require still greater courage on our part:

- This is the challenge to “hold the discomfort” by hanging on to some item of information that we know to be potentially quite explosive - and doing nothing with it.

Our initial instinct might be that we have no choice but to reveal all, on the basis that we would be compromising our integrity by withholding the truth.

Yet some more reflection on our part tells us that it would probably be best if the wider situation is allowed to play out without us being the one to throw in a “hand grenade” that is bound to cause considerable disturbance with all sorts of unpredictable consequences.

Knowing when to speak up – and hold back

How do we know when is the right time to speak up – and to hold back?

The answer is that we can’t, in advance of being in a position to assess the impact of us becoming the bearer of some unexpected truth in relation to the particular circumstances of a particular situation.

Just as integrity is about our own personal “wholeness”, so is the exercise of integrity about assessing the wholeness of any one situation - and being prepared to hold a high level of discomfort for longer than we would like to do.



Integrity and “pressing the pause button”

How much should leaders encourage a culture of questioning and challenge? Imagine for a minute that you have told your staff that as Chief Executive you look to them to exercise their own personal integrity in every aspect of their work, in line with the organisation’s values of honesty and openness.

Someone asks you to give them an example of what you mean by this. So you say that you want them to have the right to “**press the pause button**” at any time if they feel that they’re being asked to do something that would compromise their integrity in some way.

For example, suppose that your business produces toothpaste and the production team decides to reduce the amount of toothpaste that you sell consumers in your standard sized tube. The new design appears and in the eyes of some of your staff it seems to conceal this reduction in the volume of product.

Instead of saying “This was decided on high, so it’s got nothing to do with us”, one of your team takes you at your word and presses the pause button.

The “integrity challenge”

This triggers a quick turn-round review of the decision and a direct response to the “integrity challenge”.

Everyone knows that if your decision is that they should press the green button again, they will need to comply with this - or consider their position.



Integrity and empowerment

What this would do is focus on an individual's responsibility to their own sense of integrity as well as the organisation's wider values.

It would make personal integrity a real force for standard-setting at every level in the workplace.

High ambitions – and weak mechanisms

If someone's integrity tells them that the organisation is about to make a mistake and let your customers down, how much do you want to empower that individual? That's the question, surely.

Whenever we discuss empowerment, the ambitions are high and noble but the mechanisms for actually delivering it are pretty weak.

So why not give all employees some real “power” linked to their integrity and sense of personal responsibility?

If we really believe that our integrity should guide us as leaders, why shouldn't we want it to guide everyone who works as part of our wider staff team, too?

Reassuring staff

In truth, we know that as a leader you would need to reassure staff that it would not be instantly career-limiting to press the pause button on something.

They would have to have **complete faith in your integrity** to take the risk!

Integrity



Integrity and vulnerability

At a number of Leadership Conversations we have discussed how vulnerable we think we should be as leaders.

Most of us favour the idea of leaders being prepared to be vulnerable, whilst some are wary of vulnerability because they associate it with “weakness”.

Some others have experienced situations where leaders have used so-called vulnerability as a “power play” to distract attention from a shortcoming of theirs by trying to attract sympathy for themselves as victims of a situation beyond their control.

Vulnerability as a high trust behaviour

When we use the term vulnerability, we are talking about it as a high trust behaviour on the part of a leader, who is candid in saying something that could potentially be used against them and does so because their integrity tells them that this is the right thing to do.

This draws out yet again the crucial link between integrity and courage.

- It can take rather a lot of courage to let ourselves be vulnerable as leaders when we don't know what the consequences might be.

Triggering a breach of trust

In these situations, what helps to give us courage? More often than not, it is our sense that by saying nothing we might well be compromising our integrity.

An act of omission can easily become an abdication of responsibility that is so serious that it triggers a fundamental breach of trust from which there can be no return.

Integrity +

Integrity, trust and culture change

If there is one other key value that needs to be seen as sitting alongside integrity, it is surely trust:

- our **trust in ourselves** and our own integrity, as well as our trust in others and their sense of integrity.

Sometimes our integrity requires us to trust ourselves to hold back from judging a situation until we are truly in that situation and experiencing what it means for us, as it is happening.

At other times our integrity requires us to speak up almost without thinking, because something has just been said that we know to be wrong. In that moment, we feel obliged to right the wrong before another second goes past.

The significance of self-trust

It is important to acknowledge the significance of self-trust, in the way in which it enables high integrity leaders to swing from split second responses to some situations to considerably more measured – and potentially ‘discomfort-holding’ – responses to other situations.

A powerful workplace culture

If we think of **integrity** linked to **self-trust** and a heightened sense of **personal responsibility**, we have three components of what could be a very powerful workplace culture.

Taken together, they would make it possible for a CEO to forge a culture in which all staff are encouraged to have a real sense of their personal responsibility, linked to the importance that they attach to their own integrity – and high trust working across team boundaries.

Culture
change

Knowing “where the buck stops”

Some say that one of the differentiating features of a high integrity leader is their robust declaration of the principle that “the buck stops here”.

So, if the business seriously under-performs and falls significantly short of the expectations that they have encouraged their Board to have, then some high integrity leaders would see themselves as **duty bound** to resign.

They have no desire to do so, but they see their hands as tied.

It’s a **point of integrity**, no more and no less.

Accepting their responsibility – or “running away”?

In resigning, they would be making a very clear statement that as CEO they accept their personal responsibility for the business’s under-performance.

By this very action they would be seeking to make it easier for their successor to start with a clean sheet as they take on the challenge of turning the business round.

Some others disagree fundamentally with this, characterising a resignation as “running away” and “doing the easy thing”, when what they should be doing is committing themselves to stay and right the wrongs that took place under their leadership.



Integrity and accountability

Leaders take their own decisions about what sort of approach would be right in a situation where their organisation has failed to achieve its key objectives.

The first option of resignation would pose some real risks to the business, especially if it took so long for a worthy successor to take up the post that the business lost confidence in itself during the interregnum.

The second option of staying put and trying to turn things round can rather leave the issue of accountability hanging in the air, depending upon the scale of the business's under-performance.

Challenging others about their own accountabilities

If the Chief Executive Officer doesn't take responsibility for the overall performance of the business, how does this square with their Executive Directors being expected to see themselves as accountable for the part of the business that they lead?

Once the idea is out there of one rule for the boss and another rule for everyone else, values such as mutual trust and personal responsibility take a real hit.

Some argue that we shouldn't overly focus on the worst case scenario. What matters, they say, is making sure that the organisation is never in that position.

The simple fact is that a CEO who is **prepared to resign** if the overall business seriously under-performs should be in a really strong position to challenge their senior people about their own responsibilities for dealing with under-performance.



Constantly discussing what integrity MEANS

With this clarity of leadership, it becomes possible to follow this through at every level, so that:

- No-one promises any more than they can deliver, **as a point of integrity**
- No-one claims that they have done something well, when they think it's just okay, **as a point of integrity**
- No-one looks the other way when something goes wrong, **as a point of integrity**
- No-one hides from their responsibility for failure, and for learning from failure, **as a point of integrity**.

Unless these principles are argued for at every stage of a business's development, there is always a danger that pragmatism will take over remarkably quickly – and with it, day-to-day compromises to integrity will become accepted as a natural part of the business cycle.

This is why it's so important that the CEO makes a point of explaining time and again:

- why integrity and personal responsibility matter so much to them and **what they mean** in terms of day-to-day relationships within and between teams.

What
integrity
means

My word is MY bond

In drawing this Note to a conclusion, it is worth recalling the three words that have been the motto of the London Stock Exchange since the late 18th Century: *Dictum Meum Pactum*.

Some of us think there is great significance in the **personalisation** of this undertaking.

It was an offering on the part of every individual working in the London Stock Exchange that attached real significance to their personal word.

It said "my word is my bond". It did not say "our word is our bond".

Protecting "corporate reputation"

If we think of all of the corporate scandals that we have all lived through over a considerable number of years, what was the justification that various Chairs and Chief Executives gave in their resignation statements for the breach of trust that they were a party to in one way or another?

That they did what they did (or in many cases did not do) because of their concern to protect their "corporate reputation".

Time and again, these two words "corporate reputation" have been used to justify all sorts of failures of leadership.

This is why the debate about who owns integrity is so incredibly important.



"My word is my bond"

“Corporate integrity” - a step too far

Some people like to talk about corporate integrity, and indeed during this Leadership Conversation we found ourselves using this phrase a few times.

Then we checked ourselves.

No, don't let's say that, it is a step too far.

Once we legitimise the notion of corporate integrity, it's not far off from saying that corporate integrity offers some sort of cover for doing whatever we need to do to protect corporate reputation.

After all, the body whose reputation we're trying to protect is the body that owns this “integrity”.

Abdicating personal responsibility

Once we're talking in these terms, it becomes much easier to justify leadership behaviours that are actually abdications of personal responsibility:

- Such as Chairs and Non-Executive Directors not asking their Executive Directors certain questions because they are pretty sure that they know what the answers will be - and they need not to be told them in the Boardroom if they are to pretend that they don't know
- And Chief Executives of certain global charities not saying anything about the unlawful behaviours of certain senior members of staff who left their organisation with Non-Disclosure Agreements and then went on to repeat these behaviours in senior positions in other charities.

We can't “sub-contract” our integrity

Hence the importance of insisting on the personalisation of integrity. Organisations and teams can and should act with integrity.

But integrity is ours, and **ours alone**.

We can't “sub-contract” it to our organisation, however keen we might be on the organisation.

So when an individual, be that the CEO or a part-time member of staff who has just joined the organisation, gives their word that they will do something, that's a big deal.

Because their word is their bond.

Taking responsibility

If a leader breaks their word, they need a seriously good reason for this.

And if they break their word without offering any sort of reason, they have almost certainly compromised their personal integrity.

On the other hand, if they volunteer the fact that for certain reasons they have been **unable to keep their word** in the way that they hoped to do, that's different.

They have taken responsibility and now it's up for discussion.



Leading without a pre-determined script

Leading with integrity is all about leading without any sort of pre-determined script, or often any sense of certainty that we are necessarily doing the right thing.

In so many ways, doing the right thing is all about **seeking** to do the right thing.

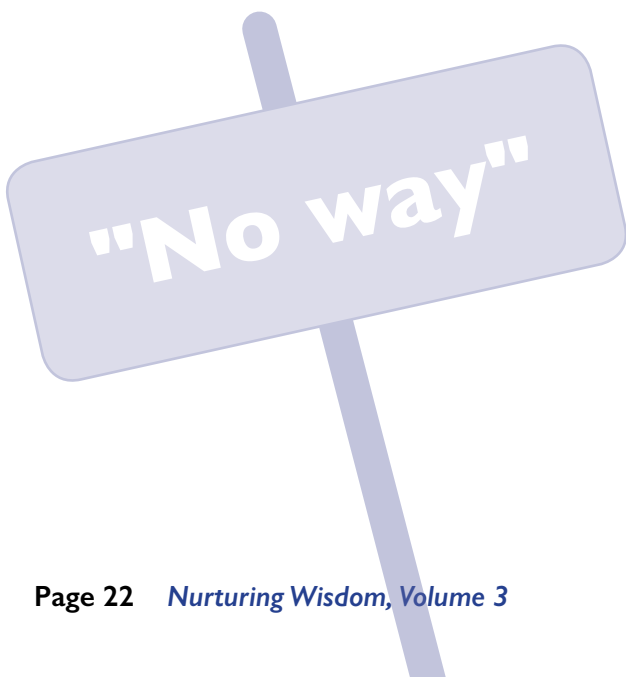
It is about having the **ambition** to do that which is right for our organisation in fulfilling its wider purpose and also that which is right according to our own sense of integrity.

“I’m not going there”

In those moments when there seems to be a clash between our own integrity and the interests of our organisation, we acknowledge this - and then seek the advice of others about the best way of managing this tension.

Integrity is about having the ability to say, very clearly, that we will not knowingly compromise our integrity on the basis that this is somehow “good” for the organisation.

If we feel that we’re under pressure to act in a way that breaches our integrity, we are relaxed and firm in saying very clearly “I’m not going there”.



“Don’t put down your own moral compass”

To support us with this, **wouldn’t it be good** if more organisations were to be more explicit in saying to their people:

- “Don’t put down your own moral compass in favour of one that you expect us to provide. That is not our role.

Indeed, the longer you remain in this organisation the keener we hope your sense of personal integrity will become.

*It is the **combined impact** of the sense of integrity of everyone working in and for this organisation that will determine the sort of business that we are.”*

How great for a Chief Executive to say this to their top team and for the team to say it to all of their respective teams.

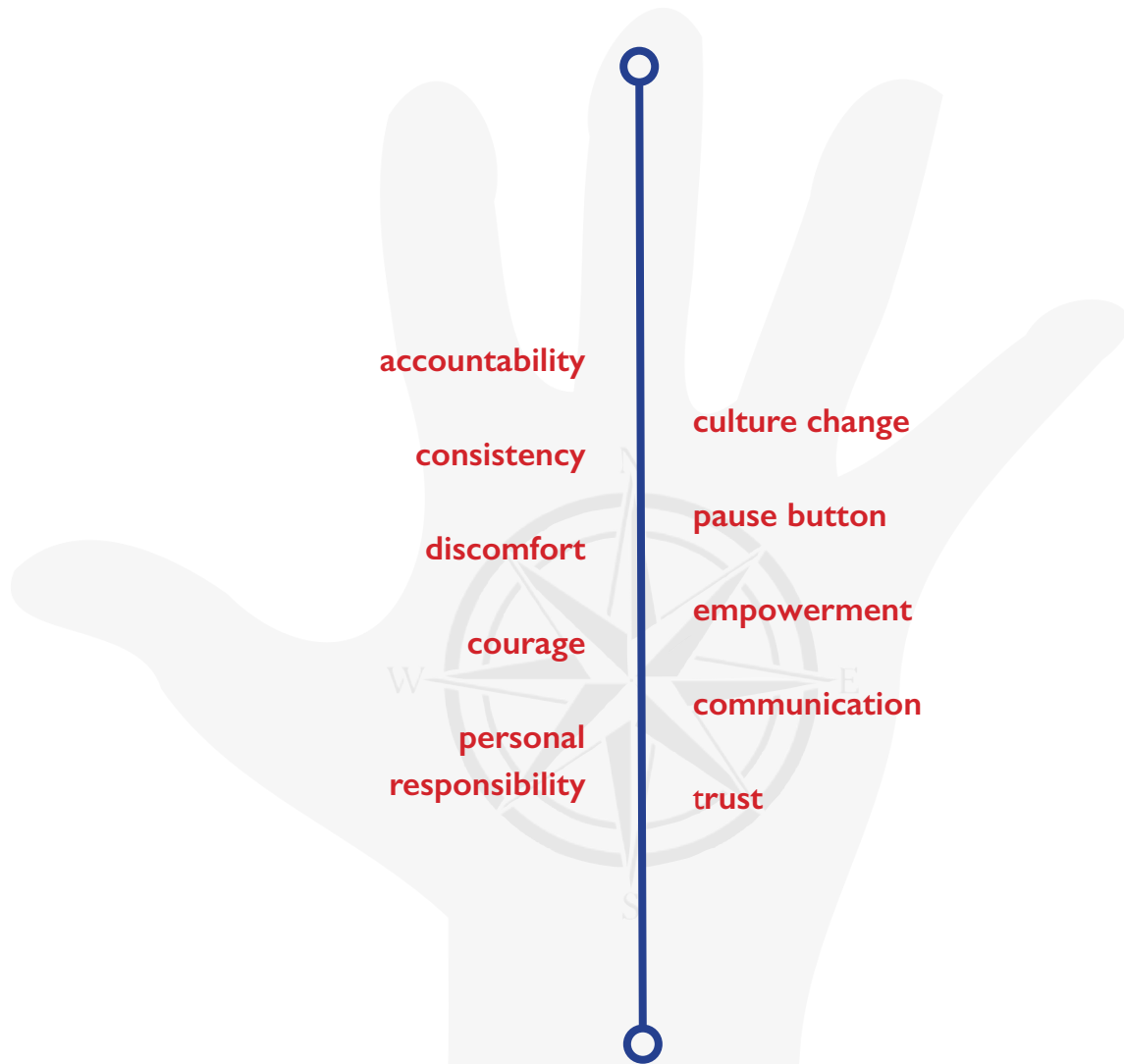
And should anyone question the significance of this undertaking from the top down, how good would it be to hear the words:

- “Of course this is vital. I give you my word.

*As you know, **my word is my bond.**”*



Organisational values



Personal integrity

CHAPTER 2



Insights from Leadership Fellows

Being more authentic as a leader

June 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

Six key propositions

i

Authenticity is fundamentally linked to TRUST

The power of authenticity as a concept is fundamentally linked to trust. Our level of trust in someone else is crucial to determining how authentic we can let ourselves be with them

ii

We need a better sense of what is DISTINCTIVE about our authenticity

We need to be more conscious of what we want to “put out there”, otherwise we will find that in our quest to become more authentic we actually become too concerned with pleasing others

iii

We need a stronger sense of SELF-LOYALTY

The powerful concept of loyalty can easily be used as a cover for a leadership style this is so externally focused that we lose sight of one of our core needs as a leader: loyalty to our own values and principles

iv

Many of us need a stronger sense of what we EXPECT from ourselves

As leaders we can easily end up being tougher on ourselves than we are on others. This is why we need to change the balance between external and internal expectations by putting integrity and courage centre-stage

v

We need to develop our capacity for SELF-COMPASSION

Through working on the value of self-compassion, we can become tougher -and more compassionate – with others as well as ourselves

vi

We need to create more TIME for ourselves

We need to create more time for ourselves, to **be** as well as to **do**, and to affirm the joy of “bringing all of ourselves” into our authenticity as leaders.

Ten questions

- 1** Do we agree that authenticity isn't ALWAYS a good thing?

- 2** With whom do we most want to be authentic?

- 3** In our key relationships as leaders, how do we manage the interface between authenticity and trust?

- 4** If we had to capture our "better self" in a few words, what would we each come up with?

- 5** Which characteristic of ours best defines us as an authentic leader?

- 6** How much is our authenticity as a leader about how we want to BE – and how much is it about the IMPACT we want to have on others?

- 7** We love to talk about our loyalty to others. How important is it to be loyal to ourselves, as part of our authenticity?

- 8** What is it that causes us to be tougher on ourselves than on others? Is it that we are more fearful of their harsh judgement than we are of our own?

- 9** How can we bring the spotlight back on to the standards by which we want to judge ourselves as leaders?

- 10** How do we NOW feel about authenticity?

I Do we agree that authenticity isn't ALWAYS a good thing?

Have you noticed that whenever people refer to authentic leadership there nearly always seems to be the assumption that it is bound to be a good thing?



Authentic leader = tick in the box

Really? At all times and in all situations?

On a day when you wake up feeling gripped by indecision and fear, or so stressed that you know you're at risk of biting off the head of the first person who says the wrong thing, is it really a good idea to let your feelings dictate your behaviour on the basis that this is you being "authentic"?

Surely not!

This doesn't mean that you have to pretend to be full of joy and optimism at times when you might actually be feeling depressed and pessimistic.

It just means that you might need to keep your head down for a few hours and hope that you're not put on the spot until you are in a better state to perform as **the leader that you want to be**.

Setting authenticity in context

What this tells us is that authenticity needs to be set in context if it is to be useful as a concept.

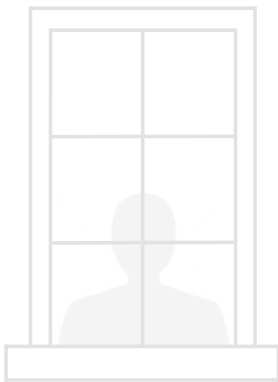
Out of context, it becomes yet another generalised abstraction that has little relevance to the real life needs of leaders.

authenticity...
in context

2 With whom do we most want to be authentic?

As leaders we have different levels of professional and personal responsibility to different people. So it's really important to ask the question:

- in whose eyes do we most want to be seen as authentic?



A “window into our true self”

This question reminds us that authenticity really is a big deal. It offers someone a “window into our true self” and a chance to see who we really are.

If we offer this to someone, then it is important that we accept responsibility for what we have done.

The fact that we don't want to **lie** about who we are doesn't make us **obliged** to expose our inner selves to everyone we come into contact with.

It's fair to be selective

So, it seems fair and reasonable to say that we should be selective in deciding **who** is going to be granted a view into our inner selves, and when.

Of course, most of us say that we want to be seen as authentic by our immediate team of closest confidantes at work.

So far, so good – and then it gets rather tricky. For example, when CEOs talk about the Chair of their Board, and Chairs talk about their CEO, a lot of uncertainty can come in.

This is no surprise, because our degree of authenticity with others depends to a large degree upon how much we trust them. In some of these key work relationships, trust is sometimes more **precarious** than either side will openly acknowledge.

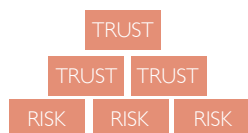
3 In our key relationships as leaders, how do we manage the interface between authenticity and trust?

This is another one of those questions that we all need to think about pretty hard before knowing what's the right answer. It is also one where there is, of course, no single right answer.

Authenticity up-front – to help BUILD trust

For some leaders, the offer of real authenticity with someone is a means of building greater trust.

The simple fact that authenticity involves a measure of risk on our part contributes a lot to the trust-building process.



As we let ourselves be authentic with others about our ambitions and fears as a leader, this helps our relationship move on to a different – and higher - level.

We know we are taking a certain risk, and we know that it can bring us some real benefits in terms of building trust.

Trust BEFORE true authenticity

In the case of other relationships, we can regard this degree of self-disclosure as a step too far.

We tell ourselves that if we are to let our guard down and be truly authentic, we first need to establish a higher level of trust.

Until that time, we need a measure of guardedness to ensure that we don't let ourselves become too vulnerable to individuals whose honourable intentions towards us cannot yet be taken for granted.

Every relationship is different. What's key is that we **trust ourselves** in determining the degree of authenticity that we should offer in each particular relationship.

Authenticity & trust

4 If we had to capture our “better self” in a few words, what would we each come up with?

This theme of authenticity and trust draws out a powerful point:

- When we talk of authentic leaders, we tend to make the assumption that what they share about themselves “authentically” makes it possible for others to achieve a **stronger connection** with them.

This connection is often described as being with their “better self”.

Describing what you see as your “better self”

This is why it would be a really good exercise for you and your immediate team to give yourselves the challenge of describing in as few words as possible what you each see as your “better self”.

We find that when leadership teams first ask themselves this question, they tend to come up with quite general terms such as:

- Approachable/ open-minded/ encouraging/ resilient/ curious/ adaptable/ strategic.

Most of these words apply to a wide range of leaders and don’t shine a particular light into anyone’s personal authenticity as a leader.

After all, if a leader didn’t feel able to associate themselves with all of these adjectives to one degree or another, there would be grounds for concern.

Identifying something more distinctive

This explains why we asked ourselves a more focused question in Windsor, to encourage Fellows to identify something more distinctive about their leadership style that they would like others to see as key to their authenticity.

It was a question that triggered some really fascinating answers.

**Authenticity
& your better self**

5 Which characteristic of ours best defines us as an authentic leader?

If you go through this exercise with your team, some might want to stick with calling themselves “good listeners” or “calm in a time of crisis”.

We suggest that you give yourselves 15 minutes or so in groups of 2 or 3 to sharpen up your personal answers, and then set aside quite a bit longer to share your answers among the team. And make a point of saying that no-one can “recycle” anything that has already been said. It’s a great ground rule!

“The joy of bringing **ALL** of yourself ...”

In Windsor, the answer from one Leadership Fellow really captured our imagination as a group.

He defined authenticity in terms of:

- “The joy of **bringing all of yourself** to something and **being part of something bigger** than yourself”.

When you look at these words, they are the sort of language that wouldn’t be out of place at an evangelical rally. Yet here we were thinking about them in a Conversation about authentic leadership – and it was **exciting**!

What really gripped us was the way in which this combined two propositions:

- Us giving all of ourselves to something, joyfully - in a way that many associate with mindfulness
- This something else being “bigger” than us and having a wider purpose that enables us to have a greater impact as leaders **because** we are part of something bigger. Wow!

*Joy - and something
bigger
than ourselves*

6 How much is our authenticity as a leader about how we want to BE – and how much is it about the IMPACT we want to have on others?

In these Insights reports we do not generally share detailed outputs from the Conversation. In this case, however, we want to offer more to help explain the discussion that this then made possible for us.

As other Leadership Fellows came up with different phrases to describe what authenticity means to them, they focused on how they want to be as leaders. They used terms such as:

- **Stretching themselves** to grow
- **Setting high standards**, whilst being a good listener with an open style
- **Leading from the front**, whilst caring for and nurturing others
- Showing that “I want to **know**” the individuals I’m working with and “**care** about what matters to them”
- Being **fiercely loyal**, “doing the best for my people and the organisation in every situation”.

The words that other Fellows used emphasised how they wanted to increase their impact as leaders, for example by:

- Providing **positive creative disruption**
- Demanding the **extraordinary** as well as offering real time **honest feedback**
- **Enabling curiosity** through insightful facilitation
- Inspiring others to **maximise their potential**
- **Optimising** the value of people.

BEING

IMPACT

7 We love to talk about our loyalty to others. How important is it to be loyal to ourselves, as part of our authenticity?

As this discussion went on, we found ourselves spending more and more time talking about what others expect from us. This is why every now and again we made a point of pulling ourselves back to the fact that authenticity is in a very fundamental sense about what we expect from **ourselves**.

Asking what sort of leader we WANT to be

If we are to be seen as authentic by others, we need a pretty good idea of whether the ways in which we are currently positioning ourselves as a leader actually reflects what we want.

This is why it can be so helpful to talk about loyalty, because this enables us to challenge ourselves about **where we see our loyalties lying**.

What holds back so many leaders

Through this discussion we shared the insight that so many leaders are held back by their ongoing preoccupation with what others think of them.

The fact that their sense of loyalty is so outward-facing stops them from acknowledging their loyalties to **themselves**, that they have to see if they are to step into their full potential as a leader.

Giving ourselves a good kicking

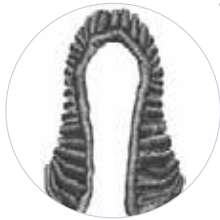
It is our occasional lack of loyalty to ourselves that makes it so easy for us to be tougher on ourselves than we are on others.

We all say that people follow **authentic and not perfect leaders**. Yet many of us love to give ourselves a good kicking on those occasions when we are other than perfect!



Authenticity & loyalty

8 What is it that causes us to be tougher on ourselves than on others? Is it that we are more fearful of their harsh judgement than we are of our own?



This line of thinking led to another insight that took a number of us by surprise and yet seemed completely natural once we had let ourselves spend a few minutes thinking it through.

A range of concerns quickly came to the surface about how we were performing as leaders. Namely:

- We tend to be “**cowardly** with our teams”
- We let our leadership be “too much about others”
- We’re “not nearly as tough on others as we are on ourselves”
- We “**hold back from being our best** when we know others aren’t being theirs”.

Worrying most about what OTHERS think

We were clear that our first instinct is to worry most about what others think of us.

Why is this? In part it’s because a term like authentic makes us ask what **others** think of our leadership and not how **we** feel we’re performing as a leader.

So, whenever we consider our authenticity as leaders, wouldn’t it be good if we could spend a little more time focusing on the values and virtues that we want to associate ourselves with, so that they really can drive our behaviours in a more conscious way than they tend to do at present?

*Authenticity & ducking
harsh judgement by others*

9 How can we bring the spotlight back on to the standards by which we want to judge ourselves as leaders?



The thought here is more about us **changing the balance** between external and internal expectations, so that the expectations that we set for **ourselves** come to the fore rather more than at present.

Integrity and courage – putting them centre-stage

This takes us back to the insights from previous Leadership Conversations on the theme of courage in leadership (Chapter 3 of *Nurturing Wisdom*, Volume 1) and leading with integrity (to be the subject of a special volume of *Nurturing Wisdom* later this year).

If we are to become rather more willing as leaders to risk criticism from others for the sake of our own principles and standards, we need a clear sense of our “bottom lines”.

Our personal integrity and courage need to be at the very heart of our internal dialogue that enables us to say to others “I am drawing a line in the sand just there, and **beyond that point I will not go**”.

The importance of self-compassion, too

As we work at projecting our own values rather more, we also need to create space to think through the force of **self-compassion**, building for example on the excellent work of [Kristin Neff](#) on this theme.

For the vast majority of leaders, more self-compassion could only be a good thing.

It should also enable us to **expect more** of others and **show them some compassion too** at those times when they fail to meet the high standards that we expect of them.

Authenticity, standards
& self-compassion

10 How do we NOW feel about authenticity?

At the end of this Leadership Conversation, our general sense was of continuing to value the concept of authenticity as a way in to asking ourselves some tough questions about the sort of leader that we **want to be** – and therefore want to project to those around us.

Devaluing the importance of what we stand for

At the same time, a number of us came to the view that our cultural preoccupation with authenticity has contributed to the process of many of us devaluing the importance of what we stand for as leaders as we seek to “adjust and trim” to make sure that those around us give us the thumbs up!



This is why we ended up spending a fair bit of time discussing **what is important to us**, as well as our authenticity. We ended up with a wide agreement that our own sense of integrity and self-loyalty and self-compassion need to be seen as sitting at the core of our authenticity.

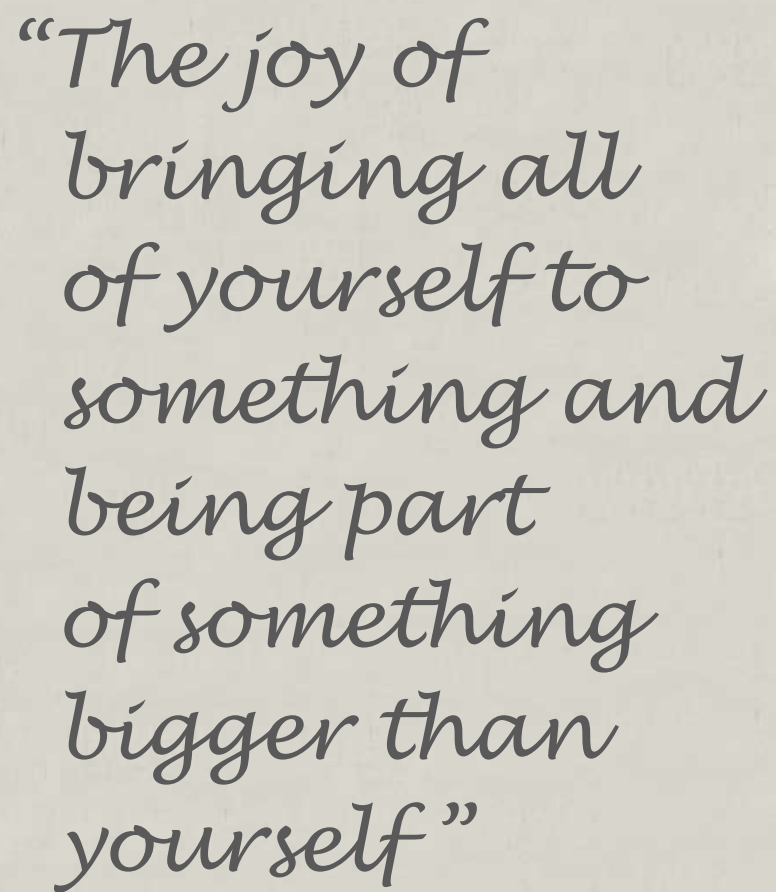
We also challenged ourselves with the thought that at times the “authentic us” might not be particularly pleasant to be with. A desire for authenticity requires us to find ways of **owning** our not so likeable side, as well as defining more clearly the core virtues that we will draw on in those moments whenever we take the moral high ground as a leader.

One other rather practical point came to the fore in the final stages of this Conversation. Most of us do not create enough time for ourselves, with the result that we don’t perhaps know ourselves as well as we think we might.

More time needed – for ourselves

We need to place a higher premium on the **time** that we all need just to **be**, and remind ourselves of the simple **joys of life**, without having to be tied in to some worthy mission that accounts for every moment of our working life.

Using the word joy again brings to mind the words of one of our Leadership Fellows during this Conversation to describe what authenticity means for him ...



*“The joy of
bringing all
of yourself to
something and
being part
of something
bigger than
yourself”*

CHAPTER 3



Insights from Leadership Fellows

From good to exceptional

May 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

Eleven qualities of exceptional leaders

On the pages that follow we set out 11 qualities of exceptional leaders.

In describing them as qualities, we should make clear that we do not regard them as in any way constant or fixed.

Rather, our sense is that as leaders we can all have moments when we demonstrate some of these qualities.

The challenge for us all is to develop them into new habits and constants that define our leadership over time.

Even then, if and when we achieve this in relation to some of these exceptional traits, we are bound to find that we slip back sometimes.

Constantly reviewing our own leadership behaviours

In these moments, we need to remind ourselves that exceptional leadership requires us constantly to review our own leadership behaviours, aware that none of us occupy fixed positions on the spectrum from not-so-good to good and then exceptional leadership.

Our position on this spectrum varies, not just every month or every week but often daily.

If some of our leadership behaviours are exceptional on a Monday afternoon, there is no reason to assume that we will continue to be exceptional on the Tuesday morning!

*Our position on this spectrum
varies - often daily*

Self-awareness

Indeed, we require exceptionally high levels of self-awareness, and ongoing self-assessment, if we are to have any chance of defining ourselves as a leader who is exceptional more often than we are good - or goodish!

This is said not in a spirit of pessimism. Rather, it is said from a standpoint of appreciating what a big step it is to go from good to exceptional – and then retain whatever these exceptional behaviours might be as a natural part of being a leader.

The precarious nature of exceptional leadership

If we are to have more than occasional glimpses of acting in a way that is exceptional, we have to become addicted to the process of constantly bettering ourselves as leaders.

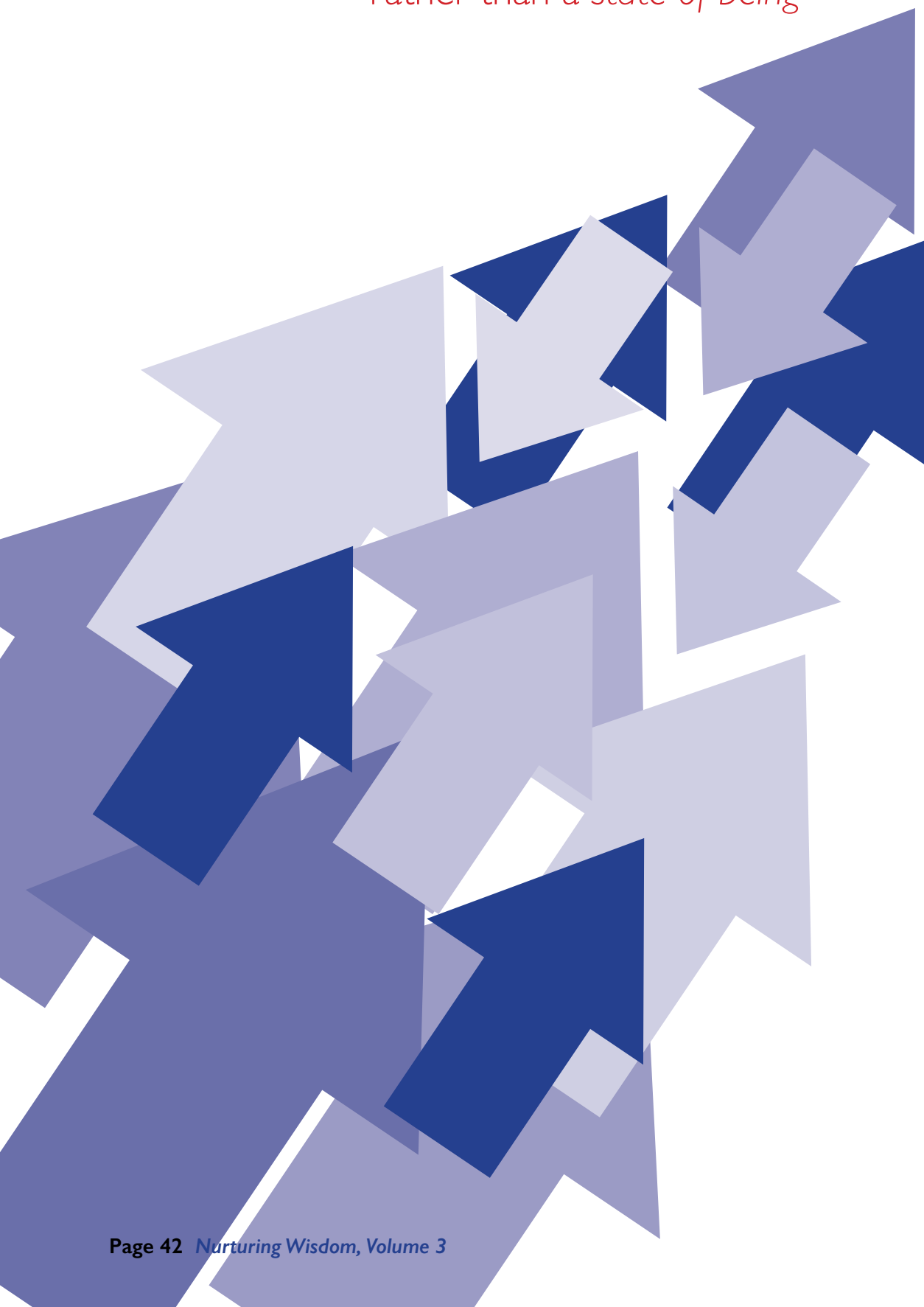
This is why those leaders who are exceptional for rather a lot of the time are readier than anyone else to talk of those times when they have been other than exceptional.

It is their awareness of the precarious nature of exceptional leadership that spurs them on to keep on raising their game – and raising it ever higher, so that when they do slip back it is to a higher base line than it was last time they slipped back.

*We have to become addicted
to the process of constantly
bettering ourselves as leaders*

From good to exceptional:

a constant state of *movement*
rather than a *state of being*



Capturing the eleven exceptional qualities:

- Seeking out “the diamond in the rough”
- Seeking to capture the essence of every challenge
- Drawing out others’ truth and in the process fostering their courage
- Promoting a team ethos in which we support each other in becoming exceptional
- Trusting our intuition in moments when it tells us to declare ourselves
- Accepting that at times leadership requires us to hold back, without compromising our sense of authority
- Being prepared to be ruthless in how we prioritise the use of our time
- Regarding directive leadership as a last resort, because we expect those around us to respect our authority and influence
- Seeking to solve problems through our influence over others
- Challenging ourselves on whether we are compromising our offer as a leader, whenever we “tone ourselves down”
- Letting our insights into our own strengths and shortcomings heighten our awareness of others.

In our relationships with those around us, we seek out “the diamond in the rough”

Whenever we are asked to describe our strengths as leaders, so many of us speak in broad terms.

We also tend to do so when we describe the leadership strengths of those with whom we work most closely, using terms such as “confident”, “strategic”, “fair” and “passionate” that only tell us a limited amount about someone’s leadership skills.

It doesn’t have to be like this.

We can follow the lead of those who have developed the ability to identify the special gifts of their closest colleagues at work.

They play them back to them every now and again, as a way of encouraging them to appreciate these gifts as much as they do.

Those leaders who are the best talent-spotters have a real knack for capturing the particular gifts of individuals – and then helping others to see how they might deploy them most effectively.

If we can also work on our ability to see “the diamond in the rough”, we should find it much easier to support others in managing those aspects of their leadership that aren’t so strong.

2 In every challenging situation we seek to capture the essence of the challenge

Every day we are bombarded with stories of situations that offer potential opportunities – and dangers – for our organisation.

So often, those who share these stories with us offer too much commentary on the basis that it is up to us to draw out whatever lessons we want.

It doesn't have to be like this.

Some leaders have trained themselves to draw out the essence of a situation very quickly indeed.

They achieve this partly through the questions that they ask and partly through the feedback that they offer the person updating them on the situation that they face.

It is an exceptional knack to be able to distil the core truth of a story and then share this in a way that encourages others to see themselves as part of a shared endeavour to understand the dynamic that drives a given situation.

This enables us to convert what can so easily be a “dumping session” into a more analytical discussion, in which others know that they are expected to offer some judgement of their own.

It helps to make best use of our time and energy, by focusing on the core leadership challenge for our organisation – and avoiding the temptation to convert a story into a “soap opera”.

3

We draw out others' truth and in the process foster their courage

We all know that we tend not to ask enough questions. Whenever we do so, we're aware of some colleagues telling us what they think we want to hear.

We know that they will hold back from offering us "difficult news" unless they are under pressure to tell us the unvarnished truth.

If we change our behaviours, this can move on too.

It is up to us to make a point of reminding others that the truth matters above all else, and we would always rather hear some difficult truths than be "protected" from having to confront them.

The moment we feel that someone is "managing the truth" on our behalf, we need to be up-front in asking them to tell us exactly how they see that situation, without feeling a need to soften the message to make it easier for us to receive it.

As we experience them being more honest and direct with us, so do we need to show appreciation of this.

It is in these sorts of moments that we embolden them, and we experience their awareness of their own courage in sharing a message that they expected us to dislike.

As we build others' courage we build our own too, knowing that the courage to face hard truths is one shared by too few leaders.

4 We promote a team ethos in which we support each other in becoming exceptional

We all say how committed we are to building the team around us. Yet when it comes to it, so many of us keep our team at arm's length.

We tell them how important they are whilst being reluctant to let them believe that we are dependent upon them for our own success as a leader.

This needs to change if we are to become an exceptional team leader.

Those leaders who head up exceptional teams have developed their own way of enabling every member of the team to feel believed in, by them.

They are quite relaxed about making clear to the team how much they depend upon them for their own success.

It is this reciprocal dependency that is at the heart of exceptional team leadership.

Team members constantly step up in the face of challenge because they believe that the success of the team, and its leader, requires them to step up.

They have no difficulty in acknowledging the importance of what others offer them, because they experience the others, and the team leader in particular, acknowledging what they themselves make possible for the whole team.

It is the team leader's belief in the exceptionalness of the team that is the hallmark of the exceptional team leader.

5 We trust our intuition in those moments when it tells us to declare ourselves

Some of us like to describe ourselves as intuitive leaders, whilst others prefer to describe themselves more as reflectors.

Even among those of us who like to see ourselves as intuitive, we will often say how we need to try not to be rash by “jumping in” too quickly.

We all know that there is nothing exceptional about this line of thinking.

We might be sitting in a meeting and suddenly someone says something that triggers a voice in us saying that we need to come in straight away and question what we have just heard.

We know that we have a split second to decide, and if we let the moment pass it might never return.

In various Leadership Conversations we have referred to these as the moments when we need to be prepared to be a “disruptive leader”.

At these times, the disruptive leader listens to the “moral driver” that tells us something is wrong and requires us to engage there and then.

It is a moment of bravery for us when we act on that split second decision, and as we do so we need to focus on what we are putting out there, especially the generosity of our tone.

If whatever we say is said generously, there is every chance that the right tone plus the right content will together offer something exceptional.



We accept that at times leadership requires us to hold back, without compromising our sense of authority

However confident we might be as leaders, we can all experience a time when something happens to us that causes us a sense of inner outrage. We feel wronged, perhaps by someone very close to us, and experience a sense of loss of equilibrium.

Our emotions tell us that we need to do something “radical” that underlines how unacceptable is the behaviour of others and how they should never put us in this situation again.

These are the times when an exceptional act of leadership might be to hold back and do nothing – for a while at least.

Such a response is completely counter-intuitive for so many leaders.

Yet it is in some of these really upsetting moments that an exceptional leader will hold back and tell themselves that however awful the situation might be, there is something underway that needs to be allowed to play out.

What we are required to do as a leader is to appear to accept an unacceptable behaviour on the part of someone else.

We need to do so without letting ourselves become a “victim” or compromising our own authority as a leader.

Then, when the time is right, we will have a chance to present in a calm and authoritative way our own proposals for ensuring that whatever happened before will never happen again.

We keep our emotions under control – and choose the right time for righting the wrong.

7 We are prepared to be ruthless in how we prioritise the use of our time

We all tell ourselves that time is the great leveller, and we have to be incredibly careful with our use of time if we are to succeed.

Yet we find that too often our time is deployed in response to what others expect of us rather than how we ourselves think we should be spending our time.

We can all get a grip on this, at any time – so long as we are prepared to link our use of time to our higher purpose as a leader.

Leaders who are exceptionally good at planning their time are careful to ensure that anyone controlling their diary is fully up to speed with their priorities at any given moment.

They are also careful to protect a proportion of their time so that it can be used for thinking/ reflection/ creative time without having to have any formal purpose (“*Thinking committee of one*”) stamped on it.

When mistakes are made with time-planning the exceptional leader is prepared to be ruthless.

They have no difficulty in keeping control of their time because they are so focused on what they wish to achieve as a leader.

If something is not a priority, then it is dispensable.

These moments must be handled with sensitivity, of course. But the principle remains that exceptionalness is vitally dependent on us always reminding ourselves of our overriding mission and purpose.

Delivering our mission requires discipline and focus - and occasional ruthlessness, not least in how we deploy our time.

8

We regard directive leadership as a last resort, because we expect those around us to respect our authority and influence

There are still many leaders who will talk about what they have “instructed” their team to do and how frustrated they sometimes are by the failure of their staff to do what they were told. They often justify their behaviour as directive leaders on the basis that they are in too much of a hurry to wait for others to catch up.

The more a leader feels a need to instruct, the more they call into question their authority as a leader.

We all know that for any of us to become a good leader, we need to invest time in developing our relationships with those around us, in a way that builds mutual respect for our respective roles – and authority.

Some leaders have an exceptional ability to ensure that others do as they ask of them, without ever issuing an instruction.

It is a matter of pride that they would never need to tell their close colleagues what to do, because to do so would call into question the specialness of the bonds that they have developed together.

They just say what they would like to happen and that is more than sufficient.

It is no surprise that leaders who have an exceptional capacity for influencing others can regard it as an act of failure on their part if they need to issue any instructions to junior staff.

What is so special about some of these influential leaders is their ability to initiate change through substituting suggestion for instruction.

They then build pace on the same basis - through their capacity to attract exceptionally high levels of loyalty from those around them.



We seek to solve problems through our influence over others

The vast majority of leaders will talk about how they get their “kicks” out of doing things, and especially solving problems. The problem is that some leaders so like solving problems that they tend to keep the problem-solving to themselves.

This leaves colleagues feeling excluded and reinforces the image of these leaders as loners.

This is not difficult to change, so long as these leaders first accept that their own behaviours constitute the real problem.

There really is something exceptional about leaders who enjoy using their influence over others to encourage them to take ownership of problems that they would previously have wanted to sort out themselves.

Influencing others in this way is not only empowering for the others but also for the leader who is investing so much of their own self-esteem in their role as an influencer.

They also have the added bonus of freeing up some of their own time. So as well as influencing others they have also influenced their own diary for the better!

The only possible problem with this approach comes when the person you're influencing to solve a problem ends up saying that they can't solve it.

In these cases they have to become a different sort of problem-solver and take on the responsibility for finding someone else to solve the problem.

In the process, they might even get to enjoy the process of influencing through enlisting others to solve problems on their behalf.

10 Whenever we “tone ourselves down”, we challenge ourselves on whether we are compromising our offer as a leader

So many leaders tell the story of how they are sometimes in situations where they need to hold back from saying what they really want to say, in case they cause offence or upset. The phrase “Let me tell you what I nearly said ...” can slip off the tongue so very easily!

We know that sometimes this is necessary. At other times, this ranks as one of the most common self-limiting behaviours of so many leaders.

There IS an alternative.

Instead of justifying themselves, the exceptional leader in this particular case challenges themselves.

Before they decide that they're not going to say something on the grounds that it might make them unpopular with one or two people, they know that they will be holding themselves to account for their behaviour a little later on.

Of course, there are times when discretion is the better part of valour and it might well be the best thing to hold back.

The point is, however, that holding back can so easily become a way of life.

This is why so many exceptional leaders tend to make themselves go through a process of self-challenge, whenever they decide to tone down how they present themselves.

They know that if they don't do so they could easily find themselves slipping into a habit that is familiar to many 'okay' leaders and has very little to do with exceptionalness.

Our insights into our own strengths and shortcomings heighten our awareness of others

Some leaders are reluctant to analyse or discuss their strengths on the basis that they don't want to be "arrogant" or indulge in "navel-gazing". Absolutely - up to a point!

This is why it is so important that whenever leaders talk of their own strengths, they don't stop there. Instead, they keep going and talk about what they're not so good at, too!

They make clear that assessing our strengths as leaders is just the beginning of a process of reflection.

Once we have a clear sense in our head of our key strengths, and those areas where we want to work at becoming exceptional, it is then much easier to move on to the next stage.

This involves us asking ourselves where we are not so strong – and where we have shortcomings that result in us getting in our own way unless we learn to manage them better and ask others to support us in keeping them in check.

It is when leaders are seen to be relaxed about discussing our own shortcomings – as well as our strengths – that it becomes easier for them to ask members of their immediate team to reciprocate.

They might even remind them of the notion popularised by Brene Brown and others of leaders "belonging to themselves".

Whatever our strengths and weaknesses might be, we own them, because we belong to ourselves.

It is from this standpoint of ownership and 'self-belonging' that it is much easier to support others in seeing more clearly their own areas of exceptionalness as leaders, as well as managing their own shortcomings.

From good to exceptional:

a constant state
of *movement*
rather than a
state of being

CHAPTER 4



Driving up Board Performance

Insights from Leadership Fellows

March 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

Seven Insights

We can all fall so easily into the “politeness trap” without owning the fact that we’re not really speaking our truth



Those of us who are Chairs and Non-Executive Directors know that there are times when we should have said to our Chief Executive, or one of the Executive Directors, “*We need better than this*”.

Yet we hardly ever allow ourselves to say this sort of thing. No, we say, we must be polite in Board meetings - and can’t be so blunt.

In the same breath, we complain about lack of honesty on the part of others, without acknowledging that our concern with being “polite” compromises this honesty that we want to see in greater abundance.

So we need to “say it as it is” and deliver this new toughness with real honesty.

Of course, it is important that we get the tone right and deliver any tough messages with generosity and warmth.

We also need to make clear that we’re ready to **hear** tough messages at the same time as offering them up.

Too often we ourselves create role traps – for example, by saying that the Chair must do the “connecting” whereas more often than not the Chair and CEO should BOTH be acting as connectors

2

We can easily find ourselves arguing in favour of certain behaviours on Boards because we believe that they are what's expected of us, rather than because they are right.

One example is to do with the role of the Chair, who is generally regarded as the person who should act as the bridge between the Non-Executive and Executive Directors.

The Chair definitely has the leading role to play in ensuring that connections are made across the Board in-between meetings, so that there are fewer surprises at the Board and all sorts of dialogues are brought to the table rather than having to start afresh.

At the same time, there are many Boards where the Chief Executive could play a more active role as a connector, too, and indeed if the Chair and CEO were to share this role more, it would be an excellent way of ensuring that all Non-Executive and Executive Directors are talking to each other more in the run-up to Board meetings.

Any technical misunderstandings should have been sorted out, thereby clearing the way for a richer and fuller discussion at the Board, made possible because both the Chair and CEO have already been facilitating whatever connections needed to be made.

So often, Boards don't develop the role of their third key player – who might be their Vice-Chair or Senior Independent Director – in the ways that they could

3

Most Boards have a third senior office-holder who could play a key role in sharing the leadership of the Board. Sometimes that person is the Vice-Chair and at other times they are the Senior Independent Director (SID).

In too many Boards, however, this third role is treated as having only occasional significance. In these situations, the Chair and CEO can develop a very tight shared grip from the centre, that can cause resentment on the part of NEDs and Executive Directors alike.

This is why there is much to be said for NEDs and Executives jointly making clear that they want their Vice-Chair, or perhaps their SID, to play a more significant leadership role. They could, for example, ask them to act as the custodian of the organisation's values and behaviours, being the first to say at the end of the meeting whether they believe that any of the Board members' behaviours were out of line with their values as a Board.

To achieve a Board led by three people rather than two, you usually need some sort of specific approach to this third person to help define a wider role beyond that set out within the constitution of the Board. Rather than waiting for the Chair to take the initiative, it is often best if one of the NEDs opens up this debate.

For Boards that are seeking to develop more inclusive ways of working, this three-way leadership model has a lot to commend it.

Some CEOs seem to believe that a sign of being successful is that they shouldn't "need" their Board. On the contrary, one of the keys to being a successful CEO is that the Board see themselves as necessary to your success

4

There is a widespread view that CEOs should generally avoid asking their Board for help with tackling a tricky problem, on the grounds that this could be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

Instead, many concentrate on reporting success stories to their Board and are reluctant to ask their Board for any support beyond approving proposals that they put before them.

More and more high performing Boards now have a very different sort of relationship with their Chief Executive. They regard any disclosure of under-performance as a sign of trust on the part of their Executive team.

Whilst they tend to be impatient and expect urgent action in response, they are more likely to remain loyal to a CEO who engages transparently with problems rather than minimising their significance because they are so keen to avoid any possible Board "interference".

As a general rule, the higher a Board performs the more likely they are to respond well – very well – to a CEO who says,

- *"I want to talk to you about something that I'm worried about, because I would really appreciate your advice about turning it round".*

When CEOs are prepared to ask their NEDs for help, this makes it easier for NEDs to reframe their role outside of Board meetings and become an informal sounding board for their Executives to help them in developing proposals before bringing them to the Board

5

This insight points to the considerable impact that a Chief Executive can have if they are prepared to seek their Board's advice in ways that would be resisted by those who believe that "strength" requires a high degree of self-sufficiency in relation to their Board.

Once a CEO is willing to seek the engagement of their NEDs in relation to some of the trickiest strategic challenges that they face, it becomes so much easier for NEDs to define their role more broadly in relation to their Executive team.

Instead of just being there to provide scrutiny and seek assurance, they can develop a more expansive view of their brief, inviting the CEO and Executive Directors to let them know how they would like to use them.

Some NEDs have greater influence over their Executive team outside of formal Board meetings than they ever do in the meetings themselves. This is no surprise, really. The most effective capacity-building takes place in settings where authority tends to sit with those whose capacity is being built.

The same is so often true of leadership development: those who are being developed are much more likely to take the key messages on board if and when they feel that they have volunteered for this process.

In general, the induction process for NEDs doesn't work. Instead of NEDs being spoken at by senior staff, there should be more of a two-way process that involves NEDs offering feedback at the end of their induction

6

One of the reasons why some NEDs end up being disruptive in Board meetings is because they feel over-managed by their Executive team, from day one. This starts with a one-way induction process.

If, instead of just being told what senior staff want them to be told, NEDs are made to feel significant and empowered from day one, just think how this could transform the transition of new members into full Board membership.

Why would there be any need for any of them to over-position at Board meetings if they feel able to make themselves seen and heard from day one?

This is why in the next section we offer a very specific proposal to ensure that

- Staff members involved in the induction of NEDs each ask them at least one thoughtful question and make a point of saying that they are keen to learn from them, because it is this collaborative culture that they see as one of the greatest strengths of their organisation.

Boards under-estimate the importance of cross-Board relationship-building at their peril! When things go wrong they can find themselves unable to stop suspicion and distrust from taking over, because the people around the Board table don't know each other well enough

7

So many Board Chairs and CEOs attach too much significance to their formal Board agenda and too little significance to the time that Board members spend together outside of meetings.

Whenever any business encounters a crisis, it is the interpersonal relationships between the Executives and Non-Executives that are key, and most of this relationship-building takes place outside of meetings.

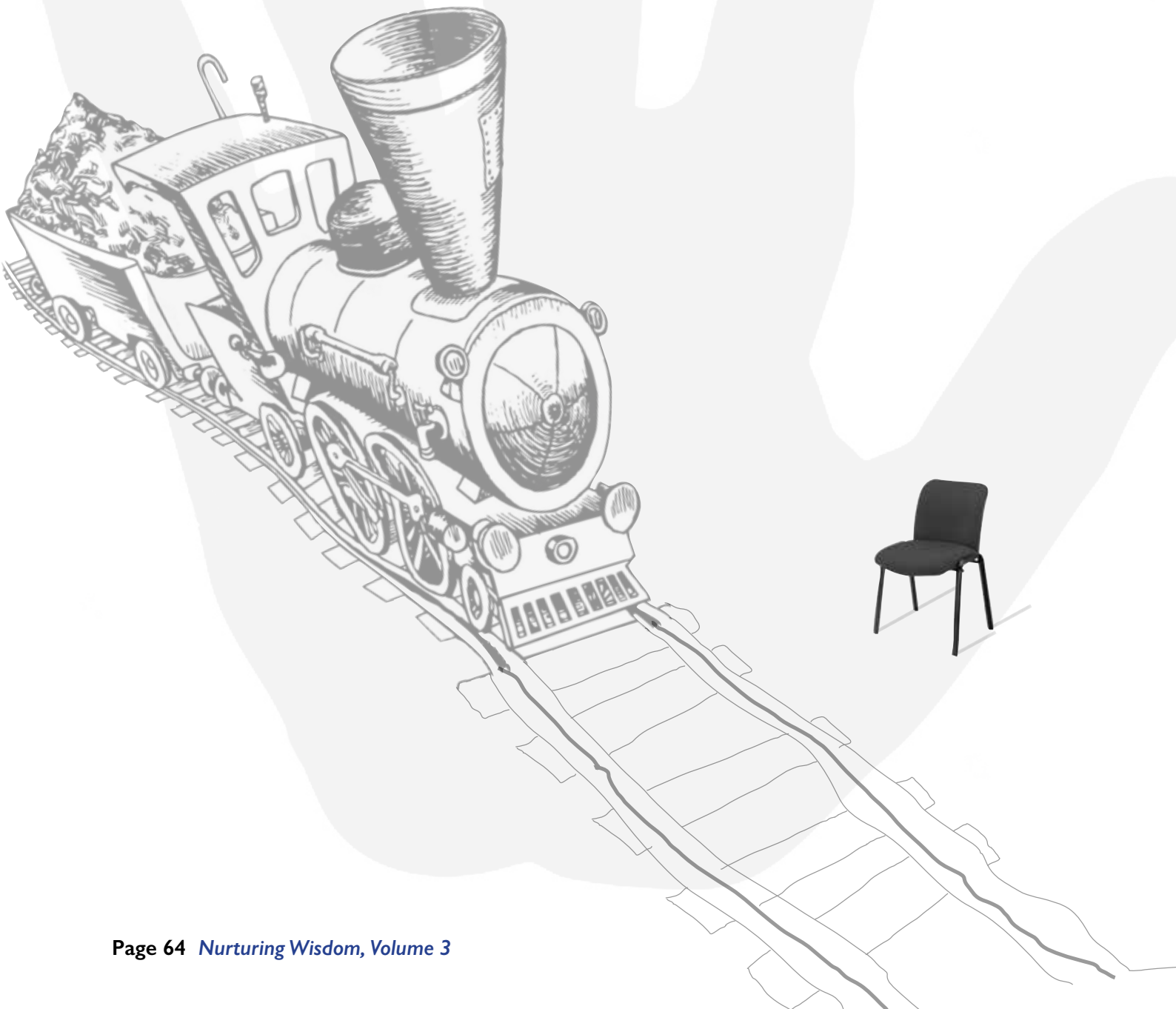
They determine how the Board set about managing the crisis and how much they are able to lead the organisation out of it as one single team.

This why informal events such as occasional dinners the night before a Board meeting, and occasional drinks after a Board meeting, are so incredibly important.

They build the identity of the Board as a group who freely invest in getting to know each other – and understanding the particular strengths and gifts that they each bring to the Boardroom.

A to G

Seven actions to drive up Board performance



Chief Executives and Chairs: invite your NEDs to assess the induction process

A

Bring the NEDs together with your staff involved in the induction process and invite the NEDs to say:

- *“What most excites them about joining the Board*
- *What, if anything, worries them about joining the Board*
- *What they most want out of the induction process.”*

Then after each presentation and discussion, senior staff should ask the NEDs:

- *“Did I give you what you were expecting?”*
- *Was there anything about my presentation that made alarm bells ring for you and we might need to return to on another occasion?”*

At the end of the induction process, each NED completes a form to be shared with all staff involved:

- Assessing the usefulness and clarity of each element of the process
- Commenting on whether they feel that their professional experiences were acknowledged by the staff presenting to them – and whether any members of staff deserve special recognition for how they engaged with them.

Chairs: occasionally create a matrix of expectations at the beginning of a Board meeting, for review at the end

B

At the beginning of a Board meeting, ask what individual members hope to achieve through the meeting and how they each hope to add value to the discussion. Invite a member of staff to write up their answers as a matrix, in two sections: AIMS and ADDED VALUE, and with their initials by each one.

Make sure that every member of the Board has their answers written on the flipchart/s and then invite a member of the secretarial staff to type this up whilst the meeting is underway and bring back copies for you (with 1 for each member of the Board) when they are ready.

At the end of the meeting, pass round the matrix and ask each member of the Board to score their own performance out of 10, in relation to aims achieved and value added as captured by them at the outset (with a separate score for each), and then with an overall score for the performance of the Board as a whole.

Board members share their scores, and those that are tough on themselves are appreciated for their candour.

All Directors are asked how they hope they might contribute more at the next meeting and ensure that the overall score is higher than it has been today.

As Chair, you invite feedback about how you might have improved your performance in relation to the score that you have given yourself and you then bring the meeting to a close.

Chairs: occasionally use check-in and check-out questions to encourage higher levels of honesty at Board meetings



Whenever you use a checking in system, it's important to ask a different question each time. If Board members have a chance to prepare for it, its impact is much diminished. For example:

- *“Before we start going through today’s agenda, is there anything in the rest of your life that you’re particularly worried about that you want to flag up now, so that we know a little more about what else is in your mind apart from our business as a Board?”*
- *“We have a strong set of papers before us from the Chief Executive and her team. Without getting into detail now, which one offers the greatest clarity and sense of purpose, and which one do you regard as the least persuasive in advance of our discussion?”*

The same applies to a checking out system at the end of a Board meeting. You always need to vary the question. For example:

- *“Before we close the meeting, can you tell us which discussion you regarded as our most productive – and what it was that made it work so well?”*
- *“If you could suggest one thing you would have liked me to have done differently today as Chair, to improve the quality of our discussions, what comes to mind first? Please don’t feel you have to be polite!”*

Chairs: establish the principle that it's not acceptable for a NED to go through the whole of a Board meeting without saying a word – and if they do, you will expect them to find other ways of adding value to their Board colleagues

D

Here again, the knack is to come up with a proposal that others are not expecting you to suggest, in order to keep them on their toes and add in that extra level of dynamism that comes through unpredictable leadership behaviours:

- *“We have a big presentation coming up from the Chief Financial Officer next time on your financial plan for the next 3 years. John, you haven’t come in on any of the discussions today, and I would be grateful if before the next Board you would make a point of spending some time with Sarah to support her in sharpening up the main financial options for us as a Board. We need rather more from you, John, than you have been able to give us today, and I am sure that we would all benefit from you taking on this role.”*

OR

- *“John, we haven’t heard your voice today and I would like us all to gain rather more benefit from your experience next time. I would like to set aside 30 minutes for a discussion on how we could work together more effectively as a Board. Would you please make a point of talking to at least 3 of the Exec Directors and 3 of your fellow NEDs and then give us a 5-minute opening to kick off this discussion. Thanks ever so much.”*

You are open and positive, and very clear that it is not an option for NEDs to sit there and say nothing.

Chairs: when you don't have any of your customers represented at Board meetings, make sure there is occasionally an empty chair - and defer to it, asking what Directors think they would say if they were there

E

An empty chair can have a real impact on the meeting, so long as you are careful to make sure that you refer to it every now and again and challenge your Board on what the customer/ consumer/ user view would be.

(In Amazon it has been their regular practice for years to leave one seat empty around their conference table and Jeff Bezos will refer to that as their customer's chair. Worth reminding ourselves that they are now the third most valuable company in the USA, ahead of Microsoft and not far behind Apple and Alphabet.)



NEDs: make sure you ask any technical questions that you want to ask Exec. Directors BEFORE the Board meeting

F

This is bound to sound incredibly obvious to some. And yet the fact remains that there are many Boards where this does not happen.

A NED will think it is fine to ask a technical question about some minute point of detail without having shown the courtesy of putting their question to the Executive Director concerned before the Board meeting.

Suppose the Chair were to say, every time there is a technical question from a NED:

- *“Did you raise that beforehand with the COO/ CFO/ CEO - and are you unhappy with the answer that they gave you? Oh, you didn’t raise it one-to-one ... next time will you please TRY, because the clock is ticking and we have some very important agenda items to discuss!”*

Where a NED pursues a question that they did take up with an Executive Director beforehand, and remains dissatisfied with the answer given by the Executive, this is then an issue on which the Chair needs to champion their NED:

- *“You asked your question beforehand, Darren, and weren’t satisfied, and now the level of assurance given by the Chief Financial Officer seems to lack a certain clarity. So, may I suggest that the Chief Executive and I meet with the two of you at the end of this meeting and send a note round the Board on what we have agreed”*

Chairs and CEOs: do something unpredictable with the agenda for each Board meeting to “stop the train” (briefly!)

G

The theme of these action points is their unpredictability – and there is no area where this is more important than in relation to Board agendas!

Some Boards have not changed the structure of their agendas for years and there is an utter predictability about them, which does nothing for the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of the Board.

This is why it would be brilliant if the two of you, as Chair and CEO, could have a shared resolve to do something unpredictable in relation to each Board agenda. Just **something** unpredictable!

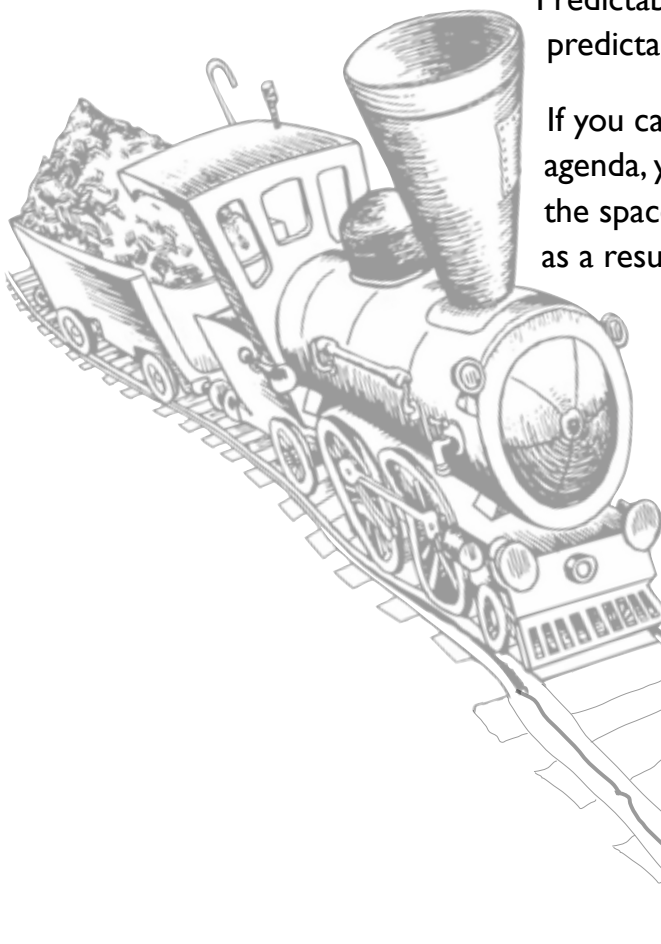
For example:

- *This might sound silly, but you could put Any Other Business as an item in the middle of the agenda.*

It just takes away that sense of the agenda as a train that will go to certain stations yet again, in exactly the same way as before, without fail.

Predictable agendas are nearly always accompanied by predictable behaviours on the part of Board Directors.

If you can introduce some unpredictable element into each agenda, you will have helped to **stop the train** – and create the space for your Board to think and act that bit differently, as a result!



CHAPTER 5



Insights from Leadership Fellows

Rethinking our approach towards challenging conversations

May 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

Challenging conversations

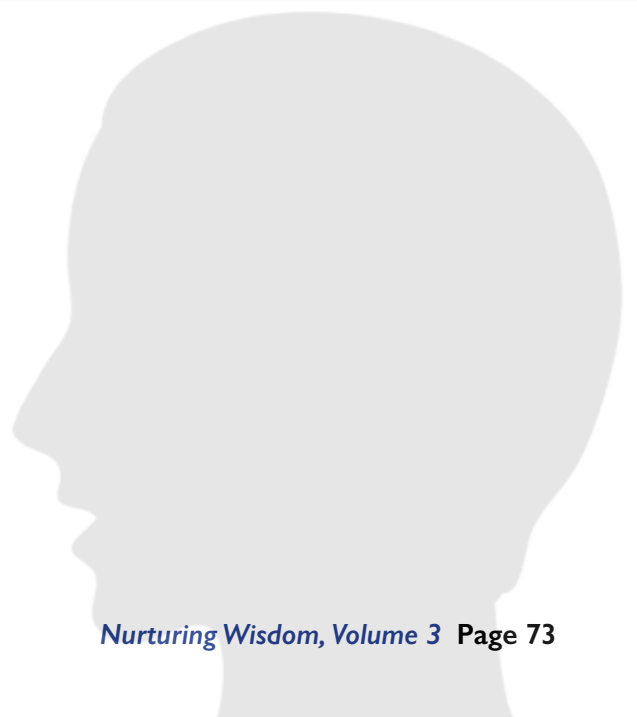
Rethinking our approach as facilitative leaders

Nearly all of us dread the idea of having a “difficult conversation”. It’s why many of us tend to put them off for as long as we can – and then when the moment comes we want to say our piece and put it behind us as quickly as possible.

So we dive in and blurt out what we have been worried about saying, and then when others are thrown by this tend to find ourselves reassuring them that what they heard wasn’t quite what we meant!

Sometimes we put the difficult conversation off for so long that the moment it happens is actually a moment of **anger** for us. A concern or resentment that we have held on to for too long comes bursting out and we surprise ourselves by the ferocity with which we deliver our message!

Then we find ourselves almost certainly having to spend a lot of time afterwards in “damage limitation” mode, trying to pick up the pieces whilst telling ourselves that we made things so much worse by putting the conversation off to a point where our anger took over!



At other times, when we think we have a really positive and upbeat message to convey, we don't give it more than a few seconds thought before we open our mouth – only to surprise ourselves by the degree of confusion and anxiety that we have generated among some of our very best people.

So – yet again – we have to think about how best to convey our message in a different way, knowing that some are now bound to interpret this as us wanting to calm troubled waters.

This is why one of the major insights for us at this Leadership Conversation was that when we see ourselves acting as facilitative leaders, we should first ask what we want to **achieve** through a conversation with a key work colleague, or a team or group of staff, that we know will in some ways be difficult and challenging.

It's incredibly important that we create time beforehand to think through how we want to convey our key messages.

Applying our principles of trust/connect/stretch

In the main body of this report, we follow through the logic of facilitating a difficult conversation, using the framework of trust/ connect/ stretch that we use for all of our Leadership Conversations.

Overleaf are the key elements of this approach in a one page summary.

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Facilitating a challenging conversation

Re-establishing your bedrock of trust

- Start with affirmation
- Then show some vulnerability
- Stress that you're about to share an idea and not a decision
- Say that you see this conversation as off-the-record and completely open

Developing a stronger connection

- Explain what you hope to ACHIEVE through your idea
- Express the hope that they will want to achieve this too
- Explain what you are ASKING of them and what you yourself want to OFFER if they agree to this ask

Going for the stretch

- Before ending the conversation, capture in a few words what your ask makes possible over time
- Make sure that within the next 24 hours you have a date agreed for your follow-up conversation to come to a shared decision.

STAGE I

Re-establishing your bedrock of trust

When you start a difficult conversation with Board members and/or senior Executives in your organisation, it is really important to say something right at the beginning to acknowledge the level of trust that you have already achieved with them.

Remind them of all that you feel you **take for granted** in your working relationship with them and how much it means to you, as well as what it has made possible for you to achieve together.

Start with affirmation

So many leaders under-estimate the importance of affirming other people, face-to-face. Please don't be one of them, especially in this moment. Look them in the eyes and say how important they are to you and all that your organisation is about.

There is no better way of starting a challenging or difficult conversation than by offering some affirmation.

Then show some vulnerability

After this, you need to say something that reminds them – in a fairly light way – that you know you are far from perfect and in your work with them you've had to struggle at times to play the role that you wanted to play.

However you say it, you need to offer something that shows some vulnerability on your part.

STAGE I

continued

Whenever we are on the receiving end of a leader saying something difficult to us, it is so easy to go away thinking to ourselves that “it’s all right for them, they seem to find everything easy”.

Something from you that involves you showing your humanity and imperfection, without making a big deal of it, would help to ensure that this conversation feels personal – and you are not seen as sitting on some sort of pedestal offering your judgement from on high.

An idea and not a decision

This is now the stage when you can say that you have an idea that you want to share with them. Whilst you’re not looking for a firm decision today, you want to explore this idea with them because you’ve been thinking about it recently and want them to have a chance to think about it too, **before** you come to a decision - hopefully shared with them.

Off-the-record and completely open

You can also say that you see this conversation as completely off-the-record and one where you hope that they will be completely open with you, just as you intend to be with them.

You think that the trust you already have means you can have this conversation without any need to try and paper over any cracks or dance around any difficult issue.

STAGE 2

Developing a stronger connection

Now you are ready to establish a stronger connection before coming to the key words that you know you want to say but could well cause the wrong impression if you blurt them out now.

Give the key reason **WHY**

The key to achieving a stronger connection now is that you say something to explain why the idea that you're about to share is important to you. As simply and positively as you can, say what you are trying to achieve.

If you achieve a connection with this, and are right about your idea being able to bring this about, you will have done what so many leaders fail to do in difficult conversations, and actually conveyed the case for your proposal **before** its consideration is clouded by any defensive reactions.

If you can, make a point of giving one or two figures to capture what you hope to achieve. They can do so much to help **ground** the conversation.

One more step

Then there's one more step before you say the difficult part of what you have to say. Make clear that you genuinely hope that they share the ambition that you have just outlined.

We know that the ends don't always justify the means, but if the ends are clear and agreed it is much easier to achieve sign up to your proposed means!

STAGE 2

continued

Express your ASK linked to your OFFER

Then with no further delay say clearly what you are asking of them.

Once that is out there, make clear what you want to offer by way of ongoing support if they decide, after some reflection, that they agree with your ask and commit to making it succeed.

The key to keeping a strong connection here is that your ask and your offer are seen as much as possible as a “single package”.

In this sort of situation, it is so easy for people to think it's unfair that they should be expected to change, whilst the person calling the shots doesn't intend to do anything different themselves!

It might well be that you won't have to change anything whatsoever, in which case it's important not to pretend otherwise.

If you **are** going to have to change what you do it is useful to flag this up, at the same time as making clear that your support for them and what they are doing is unaffected.

Also, if you are able to argue that what you are asking demonstrates your commitment to their career development within your organisation, this is the time to flag that up, too.

Your tone needs to make clear that you hope your support for them is something that they **take for granted**.

Suggest when you can next talk

In principle, it is much better to have this sort of conversation if you can say that they will have time to reflect on what you have suggested before you talk again in a few days' time.

Our desire to get a difficult conversation over and done with can so often leave the other person feeling “bounced”.

STAGE 3

Going for the stretch

DON'T just end the conversation now!

Once you have said something difficult or challenging, there is every temptation to close down the conversation and move on, with a sense of relief that the deed has been done.

Whilst you might be feeling that you got off fairly lightly, the fact is that this way you run a high risk of leaving the impression that you were happy just to throw in a “hand grenade” and leave them to deal with the fall-out.

That’s the hallmark of a stropky leader rather than a facilitative leader!

Part of the case for linking an offer to an ask is that an ask on its own can easily be received as a sign of you “offloading” and changing the rules of the game to make life easier for you.

This is why you don’t want to end the conversation on this note. Instead, it is nearly always best to go back to the **higher purpose** that your ask is all about.

Explaining what your ask makes possible

This a great opportunity for you to raise the bar, very deliberately, and talk about what you see as becoming possible if on reflection they agree with the proposal that you have just made.

One of the reasons they trust you as a leader is because they see you as having a capacity to stretch them.

STAGE 3

continued

So make a point of going for the stretch and letting yourself share some **enthusiasm** about what could now become possible, with some change in your respective roles that you will have already outlined.

This will make it easier to ensure that when you come back together to talk again, you can start that conversation by asking whether or not they feel that the **ambition** that you have shared with them now is right for the business, and right for you as individuals.

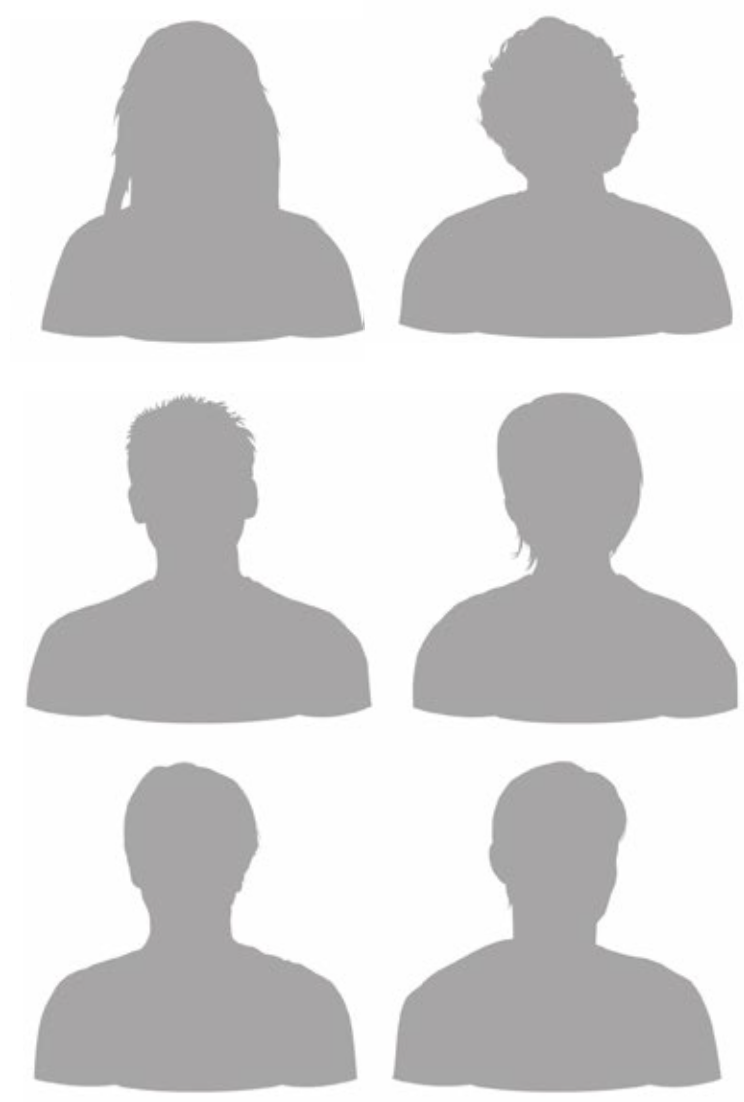
As you conclude this conversation, it is important to give every indication of taking it for granted that if they agree with you, you will do whatever is necessary to carry through what would then be a joint approach, even though it might cause a few ripples in the short term.

Agreeing a time

Before the conversation finishes, it is important to agree a time when you might talk again.

You're of course keen to hear any first reactions that they have, and just as you want them to have a chance to reflect on what you have said, so do you want to have a chance to reflect on their first reactions, too.

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH



Capturing six moments in challenging conversations

Capturing six moments

Trust

I Showing some vulnerability

Strong CEO to Executive team, trying to end the habit of over-dependency on the part of his Executives:

“As the founder of this business, I’ve got involved in everything – and I’m now struggling to let go. I know that now is the time for you and others to step forward more and I need your help for me to step back.”

2 Asking for a conversation that is completely open

Chair of Board to Non-Executive Directors, asking for advice as to whether she should stand for a second term:

“We know that in our Board meetings we’re always very polite, and I would say sometimes too cautious. I want us to spend the next 45 minutes having a discussion in which anything can be said, and we take it for granted that we can assume the best of each other. I’m genuinely unsure as to whether I should stand for a second term, and I want your advice on the basis that all that matters is what’s right for our organisation. Any outcome is fine for me, so long as I believe I’m doing the right thing.”

Capturing six moments

Connection

3 Explaining what you hope to ACHIEVE through your idea

Sales Director to a team of senior Managers from across the business, trying to build their confidence after a period of declining performance:

*“We’re still 5% down on our sales target and only have 8 weeks to go to the end of the year. I’ve looked at our performance over the last 5 years and think we can still meet our target. But it will require a big push from all of us. If we can achieve this, we will have **outperformed our three main rivals again** and all of our staff will be in line for the additional bonus that the unions negotiated last year. So I think it's worth giving this all we’ve got, don’t you?”*

4 Explaining what you are asking in terms that build up the other person

CEO to Chief Operating Officer, who has lost faith in himself due to under-performance and has one last chance of demonstrating stronger leadership before they have a very different sort of conversation:

*“I’ve said that I want this to be an off-the-record discussion just between the two of us, because I know that your confidence has taken a real hit these last few months because of our under-performance. I can tell you that I’ve had times in my career when I’ve felt that everything was against me and I’ve made myself get back in the saddle and tell my team that we were going to conquer all that was in our way – and we did, largely because I insisted that we would. It’s these moments that define the sort of leader we are and I’m completely confident that if you **step forward** and show the confidence and passion that we now need, you will be stronger than ever for these setbacks. And you will have no bigger cheerleader in this organisation than me.”*

Capturing six moments

Connection

5 Expressing the hope that they also want to achieve the same as you

Incoming CEO to a meeting of Senior Managers, trying to raise their ambitions and convey the message that she intends to lead an outstanding business in which “good” is no longer good enough:

“Since I became CEO just over two months ago, I’ve been on my mission to ‘listen and learn’, and I’ve really valued my time with some of you in this room. It’s been important to me that you could tell me to my face how unsettled you have been by the criticisms that I’ve made of this company’s previous performance.

So I want to use this chance to share with you one of the most important lessons that I take from just over 8 weeks of learning. I am convinced that a lot of the people working in our business - and I include most of you in this room when I say this - are a lot better than you seem to think you are. I think you have had a culture that goes back a fair few years of talking yourselves out of things and at times putting yourselves down. Well, my job as CEO will be to support you in leaving that behind. My intention is that we will become one of the market-leaders in our sector and every one of us here will be as proud as punch of what we’ve achieved. We can achieve whatever we want, so long as we first believe this simple truth.

I said earlier on that I want you to feel that you can be completely open with me. If you think I’m in any way wrong in my belief that we can all aim to be outstanding, and among the very best, please say so now and I will absolutely respect you for speaking your truth. I’m a great believer in diversity, especially diversity of thought. So, please tell me what you think about what I’ve just said?”

Capturing six moments

Stretch

6 Capturing what your ask makes possible over time

Co-founder of new start-up to business partner, at a stage when he knows that he now needs to back off and wants the other one to take over more without feeling in any way unsupported:

"As I've said, from the moment we first had our idea for this new start-up, I feel that we've grown it – and parented it – together. It has been an incredibly special and powerful experience. I've explained why I think it's now time for you to step forward as our CEO, with me always alongside you and backing you every step of the way, and in more of a support role. I think this will give our small staff team greater clarity and actually greater confidence that we intend to be here for years to come as a successful business.

I think some of them do wonder if we might tire of this, as we apply ourselves to the sheer graft of establishing our niche in the market and building our client base. From what they have said to me, I know how inspirational they find you and so I am very clear in my mind that if we now put your name over the door as our new CEO, we will be making one of the most positive and optimistic statements about the future of our start-up that we could ever make."

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH



CHAPTER 6



Insights from Leadership Fellows

Rebalancing our lives as leaders

July 2018

Society of Leadership Fellows
St George's House, Windsor Castle

“What would a better version of me look like?”

We asked ourselves what sorts of leaders we want to be in three years time.

As we explored this question in small groups, a number of us quickly came to the view that we can't answer this question just in relation to our lives at work.

We need to answer it in relation to the whole of our lives.

This is when it got difficult and we had to confront some hard truths.

We might have been able to wriggle off this hook and avoid some moments of reckoning.

But one Leadership Fellow made this impossible for us, when he answered the question that we had set ourselves with another one:

- *“What would a better version of me look like in three years time?”*

Aargh! Now we had to talk about the whole of our lives.

A truth we didn't want to face

As we broadened our discussions in this way, one truth quickly presented itself.

It was a truth that some of us didn't want to face.

But once we had engaged with it we couldn't look away.

We over-invest in our working lives as leaders

When we talk about our lives as leaders, our minds nearly always go straight to our lives at work.

We know that in our relationships at home, in our family and among our friends and in the community, we exercise all sorts of different leadership roles.

Yet when we think of leadership we first think of the role of ours that enables us to “put food on the table”.



Little left to give

In this role, we drive ourselves so hard to achieve what we want that we often have little left to give by the time we get home.

We have poured whatever we have to give, and sometimes more besides, into trying to be the leader that we want to be at work.

More passive

At home we become more passive, and more of a recipient.

“What’s on television, darling?” With iPhone and iPad lined up alongside us, ready for occasional texting and short emails when we feel we can get away with it, we go through the motions of being “present”.

We are, physically, and that's often just about it.

Not emotionally present

There are so many times when we are not emotionally present and our partner and family know it.

Maybe we have a few brief bursts of engagement with the people we love in our non-work life.

But in truth we know that these bursts of energy come out of what is left over, after we have given as much as we can to our life at work.

Three resolves to rebalance our lives as leaders

1 Don't "boil the ocean"

Get real about priorities and the 80/20 rule.

Instead of taking on 80% or more ourselves, focus on the critical 20% and apply ourselves – as leaders – to building and empowering those around us to take on the 80%.

If we tell ourselves that we are indispensable, we're on a hiding to nothing.

2 Stop being "the sludge in the frying pan"

That's how one Leadership Fellow described himself by the time he gets home in the evenings, with virtually nothing left to give.

It doesn't just demean us, it demeans our partner and family.

We can change this. After all, we are leaders!

3 Be emotionally present

We talk about how we fail to be emotionally present when we're at home.

If we can change this, we might be in a better position to change how we are at work, too.

After all, if we were more emotionally present at work we would be more aware when we reach those moments of overload.

We would hear the voices within us warning of the dangers of burn-out.



Leaders who think they can boil the ocean...
can't hold a candle to those who succeed
through leveraging the talents of others

Three steps to help change our mindset

1 Remind ourselves that leadership is a privilege

Some leaders can seem so burdened down by the pressures of leadership. We can almost see their shoulders slouched forward, over-burdened with the pressures of office.

Once we tell ourselves that we are privileged, doesn't it feel different.

We feel blessed to be able to drive change and impact on others in the ways that we do.

We walk tall in so many different ways.

2 Value the journey and not just the outcomes

This is one of the things that changes once we see ourselves as privileged.

The burdened leader is weighed down by the pressure of wanting to achieve so many outcomes.

The privileged leader values the journey, as well as being driven by outcomes, too.

It does matter **how** we achieve what we want, and how much members of the team feel that they are essential to this success.

3 Aim to succeed through others

The privileged leader who appreciates their route as well as the destination gets their kicks out of succeeding through the actions of others.

We see ourselves as discoverers and promoters of talent, and delight in watching others shine.

Our role is to “know the moments that matter the most” and make sure we are present then, in every sense.



Imagine a drum roll... and it's getting louder!

The greatest ideas are the *simplest*

William Golding *Lord of the Flies*

Achieving a new work-life balance as leaders: how about **colour coding** ALL of our lives?

Quite a number of leaders have colour codes that help you - and your PA - in organising your life at work.

A number haven't yet reached the stage of having any sort of colour devoted to your personal time at work that you might use for thinking and preparation before meetings. But you're moving in the right direction!

A small number of leaders have taken this concept on to the next stage and developed a colour coding system for the whole of your lives.

Five colours in this holistic system

In Windsor, we were attracted by the image of using a “box of crayons” to draw our life. We envisaged ourselves using five different colours for this holistic system, covering:



WORK

FAMILY

ME TIME

FRIENDS

VOLUNTEERING

If you like this idea, you might want to start by asking what the ideal should be.

First, however, we need to embrace the **real challenge** of asking how much of our energies we currently invest in our working life and how much we have left for the rest of our life.

How do you allocate your time and energy at the moment?

Can we think in terms of each of us having a relatively finite amount of energy that we share with others across our life?

On this basis, can we start with two killer questions:

- 1 ***What proportion of your energy do you pour into your life as a leader at work?***
- 2 ***How much does this leave you for family/friends/volunteering and YOU?***

Please be brutally honest with yourself in this moment.

Starting with your time as a leader, at work

We know that some of us have spent years trying to avoid question one.

How much of your energy do you commit to your life at work?

60%? 70%? More?

- Being really, really honest, are you sure that if you say “maybe around 70%” you’re not deceiving yourself?

Suppose we settle on 80%!

It might sound incredibly high to some – and for others, it might feel as if you have got off rather lightly!

This 80% figure might well be on the low side if you’re one of those who “*feel guilty when you’re not working*”, even when you’re in designated family time.

Looking at the residue, and how you use this time

Whether you are left with 20% of your overall energy, or slightly less or more, you now need to ask how you share this out at the moment.

- How much of you do you share with your **partner and family**?
- How much do you hold back for “**you time**”
 - whether that's pursuing a hobby or a sport or just curled up on the settee with a book?
- How much time do you give to **voluntary work**
 - whether that's being an unpaid Non-Exec Director on a Board, or just occasionally helping with a Saturday night soup run for those sleeping rough, or whatever it might be?
- And how much of yourself do you give to your time with **close friends**?

No time to spare for this luxury

When we discussed this in Windsor, some Fellows said that they haven't had close out-of-work friends for years.

It's as if they told themselves some years ago that they no longer had time to spare for this luxury.

As a result, they were anxious about how they would go about changing this.

Knowing the baseline that you are starting from

Now you know the baseline that you're starting from.

Even though you might not want to shout about the figures that you've come up with, at least you have confronted the truth of how you allocate your time and energy at the moment.

Now let's ask what you would like the position to be in twelve months time.

Setting your 12 month target for yourself at work

Once again, let's start with the key question:

- ***In twelve months time, how much of your total personal energy system would you like to be investing in your leadership at work?***

Could you keep that to 50% or does that feel unrealistically low?

Some successful leaders manage to split their time on the basis of:

- 1/3 for work
- 1/3 for family and friends
- 1/3 for “me time” and volunteering.

Offered up without condition

We know that however you divide your energy “cake”, so much of the cake has been offered up to your leadership at work without condition up to now.

This is the key factor that needs to change.

You need a realistic target

Whatever percentage figure you set for the proportion of your overall energy that you give to work, the key is that you are setting some sort of limit.

You are **taking back control**.

When you are setting your 12 month target, please remember that it's better to have a 60% target and aim to beat it than to have a third/ a third/ a third target and dismiss that as a silliness in a few months time.

You need a realistic target that you have some faith in.

This will then enable you to move on to the next stage and ask how you want to divvy up that which is left among the other strands of your life.

The other **four** colour codes

Out of what is left, please now think of yourself in twelve months time and ask how you would like to be dividing your energy and time between

- your partner/family
- yourself
- your voluntary commitments and
- your friends.

Valuing each colour in its own right

As you answer this question, it will be important to think through how you want to value and protect the energy that you invest in these parts of your life in a way that you have maybe never quite done before.

In this situation, the real challenge is to leave behind the old habit of defining each colour in terms of that which is **left over** once we've given all that we need to give to work.

Now you are creating new limits and boundaries, so that each colour here exists on its own terms and in its own right.

Sharing your promise with those you are close to

Once you are clear what you're aiming for, it is important to challenge yourself on whether this actually is a **promise** that you are making to yourself.

If it is, it could be really good to share this with those you are close to, because it is a promise that you are making to them, too.



Agreeing practical steps for moving forward

For those who are promising to increase your emotional commitment to your partner and family, it can help a lot if you share with them a small number of practical steps that you have in mind to help you in making this transition.

The key here is to get specific - and **put it out there!**

You will have to let go of some well-established habits, and you know that they became established in the first place through you putting yourself in a frame of mind that involved a fairly high degree of denial.

Four specific steps you could take straight away

For severe workaholics (and there are a few of us around!) it could be a really significant step forward to say:

- i You won't take your iPhone/iPad or laptop into the bedroom again. You will close the lid on your laptop whenever you are in a family situation, unless you agree that there is a **compelling reason** for why you need to keep half an eye on your Inbox (you know you need to make it difficult for yourself here, or nothing will change!)
- ii For at least one day at the weekend you will not look at your Inbox at all, and you'll expect to stand by this undertaking as a point of honour
- iii For key work colleagues who occasionally need to communicate with you on weekday evenings or at weekends, you will agree a certain out-of-work time zone when you can receive urgent telephone calls, on the basis that any calls at other times will go straight to your answerphone
- iv You will also agree that beyond a certain time in the evening you will not respond to any texts or emails from work colleagues, unless you can describe the situation as an emergency whilst keeping a straight face!

An ongoing process of negotiation

We need our partners and families and friends to help us navigate quite a tricky transition here.

We first need to **want** to make this transition, and to be clear in our minds that the better version of ourselves that we want to be in the future requires us to change the balance between our working lives and the rest of our lives.

Changing this balance and then maintaining the new balance once we have achieved it will require an ongoing process of negotiation and adjustment, accompanied – hopefully! – by lots of affirmation of all the good things that are being made possible as we move forward.

Once we are no longer “boiling the ocean” and wouldn’t even joke about being the “sludge at the bottom of the frying pan”, won’t that be brilliant!

Having honest discussions at home

The great appeal of the colour coding idea is that it forces us to be honest with ourselves.

Once we have achieved this, it will be so much easier to have the discussions that we need to have at home about how we want to reform ourselves.

Whilst this might initially be greeted by an element of scepticism, we know that there will be a huge amount of goodwill towards us from all who really want the best for us.

What an act of leadership!

And doesn’t it show the importance of **self-leadership** for the fully rounded leader.



No more denial!



Okay, the phrase “fully rounded leader” might feel a little ambitious at the moment!

The fact is, though, that if you pick up this idea of colour coding to try and move towards the better version of yourself that you want to become across your entire life, that will be a really big deal.

You will be able to say to your partner,

“I buried my head in the sand for so long! And now it feels like a lifetime ago since we were together in the same room and I wasn’t even emotionally present....”



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