

# Leadership Update

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## Special points of interest:

- Far too many of today's leaders seem to be amoral, unethical and incompetent
- We seem to have forgotten that countries are built on communities
- Unquestioning acceptance of what we are told leads to disaster
- We need leaders with the ability to deal with long term issues both conceptually and practically

## The first of the new

Its almost a year since I last wrote a Leadership Update.

The reason I stopped was that I felt totally discouraged by the abysmal quality of leadership shown by our "leaders" - nationally and internationally—in politics, religion, commerce, and most of the other areas in which leadership is essential.

Nothing has changed—as the French proverb says, *'the more things change, the more they stay the same'*. Yet something must be done. In a few short days New South Wales in Australia will have elections and, later this year, Australia will have elections for the Federal Parliament. Next year is the USA's presiden-

tial election and somewhere about elections are also due in the UK. Thanks to "The Coalition of the Willing" the world is a significantly more fragile and dangerous place than it was five years ago and despite the fact of the economy of Australia being stronger than it has been for years, published surveys indicate that people are far less happy than was the case a few years ago.

I look at my children (5) and grandchildren (4) and wonder what sort of world my generation is bequeathing to them.

If the core of leadership is to create an environment in which people can be successful—and I believe it

is—then what currently passes for leadership in virtually every arena has failed dismally. Leadership has become factionally focused with an emphasis on ensuring that your supporters are successful while having scant regard for anyone who fails to accord "the leader" the deference desired. Under such a "leadership", lies, obfuscations, and other manipulations become both common place and, at least by those who benefit, acceptable. Politically (on all sides of politics) and socially, in the main we are being lead by people who show little or no understanding of their responsibilities and appear to be even less competent to perform even if they did understand it.

What a tragedy.

## Economy or Society?

In Australia we are constantly reminded of the strength of the economy. Government at both national and state level pride themselves on low debt and increasing profits for business—which equates to increases in chare price

and more wealth for "the haves".

The problem is that we have lost sight of the fact that we are also a society—groups of communities of people—many of whom are not in the category of "the

haves".

Good political leadership would be concentrating also on societal issues—government must be for the "have nots" just as much as for everyone else.

## Follower-Abuse

In her book *“The Untouched Key”* (1991, Anchor Books, NY) Alice Miller uses the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac to illustrate a major problem. In context Miller is using the story to comment on child abuse but her message is equally valid for follower-abuse. (I define *“follower-abuse”* as being the way we are treated today by almost all those in political, social, religious, and business leadership roles.)

Miller uses pictorial representations of this story to illustrate how Abraham’s eyes are focused upward on “God”

while covering Isaac’s face in such a way that Isaac’s voice cannot be heard or his eyes seen. Abraham believes that the murder is justified because it shows how great is his love for God.

Miller writes (p139) “... As I sat in the archive looking at the pictures, I suddenly saw in them the symbolic representation of our present situation. Inexorably, weapons are being produced for the obvious purpose of destroying the next generation. Yet those who are profiting from the production of these weapons, while enhancing their prestige and power,

somehow manage not to think of this ultimate result. Like Abraham, they do not see what their hands are doing, and they devote their entire attention to fulfilling expectations from “above”, ...”

The ‘coalition of the willing’ has destroyed Iraq and now seems hell-bent on destroying Iran—all based on a belief that they have the answers. There seems to be a belief that they are obeying a higher power—the ideology of “freedom and democracy” and therefore know what is best. The approach seems to be that this is “all for your own good!” Tell that to the dead and injured; the displaced and the suffering from this evil invasion.

## The ram in the thicket

In the biblical story, an angel stops Abraham from killing Isaac and draws attention to a ram that is caught up in a bush. Abraham is told to substitute the ram for Isaac and the story ends on a positive note (except for the ram!).

Today it is the general populace that must stop the state-initiated terrorism and murder in Iraq. It is clear that the vast majority of people in the USA, Great Britain, Australia (and most other places) recognise the truth and

want the US and her allies out of Iraq. They certainly don’t want any escalation into Iran or other countries. We have been fooled long enough.

The problem is that our “leaders” have their hands covering our faces. They are looking upward to whatever it is that they believe is important. They are not looking at or listening to us—we are unimportant in their scheme of things. We must find ways of making them listen. We must find

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ways of forcing them to face us—eye-to-eye. Our tools must be the election box and the media. The move has started in the USA—the elections last year made that clear—but the Democrats are still stifled by a fear of being demonized as being pro-terrorist or anti “our forces”. We need courage. We need leadership that stops the fiasco in Iraq.

## The emperor’s clothes

In the same book, Alice Miller also uses the example of Hans Christian Anderson’s story about the emperor’s new clothes. She makes the point that fear of being thought stupid or of being unsuitable for one’s position held everyone back from telling the emperor the truth.

It is this same fear that today is preyed upon by those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and/or for furthering particular political agendas such as maintaining control of middle eastern oil. There is a tendency to demonise those who disagree—“you’re undermining the troops;

you’re giving comfort to terrorists or our enemies, etc” The result is that leadership lapses and evil continues.

If we want to be leaders; if we want to have true leadership; then we must make it clear that the emperor has no clothes and we must seek to correct the situation.

## Leadership: a holistic process

There seems to be a perception among some political leaders (and probably among other leaders as well) that they should be assessed on only the “good” things that they do—the emphasis on Australia’s strong economy is a salient example.

In fact leadership is a process—and part of that process is the sum of the interactions a leader has with his or her followers over the period he or she is in a leadership role. To be effective a leader has to be respected

and that respect has to be both earned and then maintained. Its like a bank account—takes quite a while to build the balance to a high level but it can be emptied very quickly unless there are constant deposits that are in excess of any withdrawals.

Too many leaders seem to act as if they are operating a credit card—go heavily into debt; pay the minimum balance each month; and hope that there will be money available when it is urgently needed.

When I was doing my officer training in the armed services it was stressed to me that “it is not what is on your shoulders that is important: it’s what holds it up there”. Respect comes and is maintained because people realise they can trust your words and your actions—your character leads to behaviours that encourage them and help them succeed in whatever it is you ask them to do.

Where can we find and how can we keep leaders like that?

## The leaders we deserve

It has been said that we get the leaders we deserve. In other words, if we abdicate civic responsibility the void must be filled by something—and all too often that leads to a downward spiral of quality and competence. I believe we see this today across the board.

An unquestioning acceptance of what is said by politicians, religious leaders, business heads, and other authorities (whether individuals or texts) leads to disaster. The whole of our

traditional education and social systems have been predicated on the premise that people

should be taught to obey those in authority. This is no longer appropriate. Unthinking allegiance to authority lead to Nazi Germany and all the evils associated with totalitarianism. It also lead to today’s Iraq.

If we want improved leadership then

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we must become people who question in every aspect of life—political, religious/spiritual, business etc. Lets not accept things at face value but check their accuracy and validity.

Would that we had done that a few years ago!

## Question, question !!!

Good leaders question the advice they are given. They want to ensure that they actions they initiate are based on the very best and most accurate information available. They are very suspicious when advice seems to mirror their own thoughts too closely.

Yet what we still find in politics and

business is that decision makers today prefer advice that supports their own opinions rather than challenging them. The result is “group think” with all its attendant problems—“Bay of Pigs” comes to mind although that was far less disastrous that George Bush’s Iraq adventure.

As followers we must question our leaders. As leaders we must question both our own preconceptions and prejudices as well as all advice we receive. It is only when there is a strong culture of questioning to the end of getting as close to the truth as possible that we get strong organisations and good leadership.

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## Looking Ahead

Although “those who ignore history are doomed to repeat history” we must never forget that leadership is forward-looking. Leadership learns from the past, prepares for the future, but operates in the present.

Don Beck and Chris Cowan in their seminars on Spiral Dynamics make the point that today’s problems are generally yesterday’s solutions. They also stress the importance of recognising that getting rid of what you don’t want is vastly different from getting what you do want.

These are important points as we consider future leadership in every area of human endeavour. We know that the fiasco in Iraq and other countries

is generally caused by meddling from third parties who dislike the government (whether or not elected as in the Palestinian Territories) and we know that many of us are totally dissatisfied with the current leadership we experience in the political, business, social, and religious arenas. Now we need to learn and move forward.

We need leaders who, in Spiral Dynamics’ terms, are second tier thinkers—people who see the big picture and are not constrained by ideologies or party politics. We need leaders who, in Elliott Jaques’ terms operate at stratum VIII—able to understand and deal conceptually with issues 50 years hence—in other words, able to consider the flow-on effects of today’s

actions and so ameliorate possible future negatives.

We need leaders who exemplify unconditional respect in their interactions with every person regardless of how the other person acts—they must have the ability to distinguish between the person as an individual and their actions. Such leaders will encourage diplomacy and eschew violence—they will recognise that war never solves a problem—it simply brings about new ones.

The challenge we face is to find, coach, mentor and encourage people with these characteristics so that tomorrow’s leaders are men and women of whom we can all be proud as they build communities in which everyone can succeed.