

Leadership Update

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Special points of interest:

- Despite the optimists who see things as improving, the reality is that almost certainly far more businesses are going to collapse, unemployment is going to rise, and many people will suffer the stress of losing their savings, their homes, and their sense of self worth.
- Leaders can help these people—but we have to start from where they are—not where we would like them to be.
- When people are in the red zone, only blue zone leadership can help.

Personal issues of leadership

In 1999 the overseas based organisation of which I was a part suffered problems resulting in closure of a number of operations. In June 2000, the Australian operations were closed. I was devastated by this. I had invested 13 years in this company as well as significant amounts of money. There was nothing available to me or the other shareholders when the wind up was completed.

As readers of this newsletter know, over the last 9 years I have been re-establishing myself both under my own brand and with Group 8 Management Pty Ltd but it has taken me

until now before I could talk about the feeling of total devastation that I felt back in June 2000.

The time is now right for me to reflect on this because of two things—first my own growth has enabled me to deal with the sense of bitterness and betrayal that was once there; and, second, because I am very aware that in today's environment there are other people having similar experiences.

Economic commentators have been warning that the global financial crisis is not over and today The World Bank warned that the recession has a long way to go and could get even more severe.

Despite the optimists who see things as improving, the reality is that almost certainly far more businesses are going to collapse, unemployment is going to rise, and many people will suffer the stress of losing their savings, their homes, and their sense of self worth.

Over the past 9 years I have learned many things—and I am very aware that there is much left yet to learn—and most of these relate to leadership. It is these lessons that I want to share in this newsletter. My experience is my own but my learnings may help someone else.

My lessons from life

I am going to group these lessons under the following headings:

- Dealing with grief
- Picking up the pieces
- Starting over
- Moving on

There's nothing particu-

larly new about my learnings—I know that myriad others have gone through similar situations and have come out far more successfully than have I. However, over recent weeks I have become increasingly aware that others do want to know about my growth path and

have found it helpful in their own journey through the 'slough of despair' that all too often threatens to lead to depression and the feelings of uselessness and futility that result in a total loss of self confidence.

It's a leadership issue.

Dealing with grief

When the overseas collapse came I was totally unprepared for it. There had been no warnings to shareholders and it quickly became clear that some people had done well (all quite legally) while others, like myself, lost out totally. Rather than accept my situation and move on, I decided to try and maintain the local operations in the vain belief that there was no systemic problem in the business model.

I was wrong.

A year later I knew this when it was

Picking up the pieces

In 1999 I was 56 years old and had 3 children at primary school—at least 6 years of schooling were still required for the eldest and 9 years for the youngest. At the same time my mother-in-law was showing early signs of the onset of dementia and, as a family, we were torn between a desire to spend time in Melbourne where she lived and the need to continue in Sydney.

Now we had additional pressures – mainly financial—to add into the mix.

Starting over

My growth restarted when I looked for help outside of my normal support systems. For years I had kept a sign in my office which read *Insanity is doing the same things yet expecting different results*. After about a year I realized that I had fallen into that trap.

I had been successful. I had made good decisions. Now I was squirming around in

clear that there was no future for the company. My anger and denial had meant that not only was I further hurt, but also that I was prevented from confronting reality, dealing with the situation, and moving forward. My finger pointing was directed at myself. I was the fool who had made all the mistakes—or so I told myself. A total loss of confidence was the result.

Of course all the books and counselors make it clear that acceptance of the situation is essential. From my own training in psychology and counseling

And at that time most of the support systems I had seemed to melt away. Prospective employers didn't want to know me—it seemed I was too qualified and/or too old. Other people with whom I spoke seemed far more intent on apportioning blame than they were in facilitating acceptance and growth. They seemed incapable of understanding that a concentration on what went wrong was focusing on the wrong thing. I knew what had gone wrong. I could accept that I'd

self pity and anger. I had to break the cycle that had developed since the crash and get back to what I knew I could do. It was a person from right outside my normal support system who got this through to me.

In an unguarded moment I shared some of my recent experiences with an acquaintance. He didn't say much, but within days he had been instrumental in having me in-

I knew this to be the case and, in fact, I had advised others of this when they had come to me for help. I had no excuse. It was just so different when it happened to me!

It took me another year before I was able to start thinking in terms of anything other than short-term survival—and that didn't really help me or my family over that period.

I had to learn that acceptance of the current situation—especially if it is bad—is an essential prerequisite for healing and growth to occur.

My anger and denial had meant that not only was I further hurt, but also that I was prevented from confronting reality, dealing with the situation, and moving forward

made some bad decisions. What I needed was help in picking up the pieces so that I could deal positively with the complexities of everyday living from both a family and a business perspective.

To pick up the pieces I had to focus on the future—not the past—and no-one seemed interested in helping me to do this..

vited to be a keynote speaker on leadership at a conference in Japan. As I was forced to work on that presentation I remembered the things that had worked in the past—and I started to implement them.

That one positive experience started me back on the upward path. There was a long way to go—but the restart was under way.

Moving on

The last 7 years have seen me move on to a new adventure. In 2001 we formed Group 8 Management which was later incorporated and with the addition of new people in the organization we have formed a subsidiary business, Group 8 Education, which is having a significant impact on schools in Victoria Australia and in England.

Arising from this work has been a new understanding of what is involved in being a leader and of how leadership impacts on everyone.

This work arose because, around 2001, one of my colleagues, John Corrigan, decided to dedicate 10 years to understanding and transforming an educational system that was failing

students, teachers, parents, and society at large.

We started this work by understanding what parents, teachers and students saw as their ideal school. From here we researched both how important was each of the identified factors and how well teachers and schools rated on each factor. It quickly became clear that what was ideal for a student to learn was also ideal for classroom management. We also discovered that the best teachers—about 5% of every teaching population—intuitively understood this and used it in their approach to all aspects of pedagogy.

The quest then moved to helping eve-

ryone in every school to understand and apply this research. After some false starts we realized that changing behaviour without changing the culture of a school was not going to happen. Despite the best will in the world by dedicated teachers, where their new behaviour clashed with the established culture, culture won out every time.

This led us to examining the whole issue of neuroscience and its application to leadership and culture change. We learned that the default state for most people is what we term “the red zone” while that which is necessary for change and growth is what we call “the blue zone”. I wish I’d known that in 1999 and 2000.

The more we can learn to have blue zone dominance, the better we will be able to positively address whatever life throws at us

Red, blue, or ????

What I now realise is that back in 1999 I was operating primarily in the red zone—and so were most of those in my support system. It took someone who was not caught up in stimulus-response; did not play the blame game; was outside of the “be a victim-make a victim” cycle to help me move forward.

I was lucky.

Current research in neuroscience has shown that our brains have three distinct segments that can be described as the reptilian brain, the limbic brain, and the neocortical brain.

The reptilian brain is that part which humans have in common with every other living creature. It is all about survival—the fight, flight, or freeze mechanism—and enables us to exist without any relationships with our offspring, siblings, parents, or anyone/anything else. It is the oldest part

of the brain and is all about rapid, instinctive action when threat occurs.

The limbic brain is about relationships. It is common to all mammals and enables us to take care of our own. This part of the brain evolved some 65 million years ago.

The newest part of the brain is the neocortical brain that evolved about 100,000 years ago. This is the part of the brain that allows for growth through learning and that that deals with complexity and ambiguity. It allows us to consider strategies and tactics, weigh options, and make informed choices.

In Group 8 Management parlance, “the red zone” is an approach that is dominated by the reptilian and limbic brains. It is characterised by behaviours that show judgement, criticism, loaded questions, sarcasm, fear, con-

ditional respect, advising or telling, and moderate to high levels of stress. In contrast, “the blue zone” is dominated by the neocortical brain. This is characterised by openness, deep listening, providing an atmosphere of safety for people to say and think whatever they wish and to try new actions, giving people permission to “be different” from the status quo, asking neutral open questions, and giving positive feedback. It is a low stress position in terms of stress levels on both oneself and on others.

We all have both zones available—the issue relates to which zone dominates our overall approach to life and its exigencies. The more we can learn to have blue zone dominance, the better we will be able to positively address whatever life throws at us.

How and In What Way Can We Help You?

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The past we must accept; the present we live in; the future we can change

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Douglas G Long & Associates provides the following services:

- 360⁰ Leadership Surveys using the Australian developed Diamond Leadership Approach
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- Change Facilitation
- Leadership Development Workshops & Facilitation
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Please contact us to discuss how we may be able to assist you improve organisational and Individual performance in your operations through true leadership.

If you do not wish to receive Leadership Updates, please contact us and we will remove your name from our list.

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The leadership needed today

Today there are many organisations and many people in or very close to the same situation in which I found myself in 1999 and 2000. And every indication is that these numbers will grow significantly over coming months. There is a high probability that the leadership these organisations and people experience will be little or no different from what I experienced—and that was primarily dysfunctional and of very little real value.

This raises a very important leadership issue.

As leaders we have a responsibility to help people be successful—to provide an environment in which they can achieve their own (and the organisation's [be it business, social, family, school etc]) goals. To do this we need to have an approach which is based in

the blue zone because only when we are ourselves in the blue zone can we help another person or persons to make this shift which is so vital for moving forward.

It has been said that *he who has life has hope; he who has hope has everything*. Part of our task as leaders is to help people have hope both in themselves and in the future.

Group 8's research has shown that for children to grow and learn they need to be in a situation in which:

They feel safe

They feel respected

They feel believed in

They are listened to

In every walk of life, people today need exactly the same things if they are to experience the growth and learning necessary for them to move forward. This is especially true if they are experi-

encing difficulties of any sort.

It has become very clear that to provide the environment in which these conditions exist, there needs to be a culture which fosters such an approach. The task of developing and maintaining such a culture is central to leadership and the role of a leader.

We have proof that leaders in schools can learn to provide such a culture and that it can impact positively on every hard and soft measurement applied—whether internal and external.

We know such a culture can be developed in every other sort of organisation and environment.

What are you doing right now to provide the sort of leadership your people, and society as a whole, needs today?

What are you going to do?