

Leadership Update

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Special points of interest:

- Good leadership inspires people to do good things.
- The primary function of a leader is to create an environment in which people can achieve desired results—consciously setting people up for success
- people are basically good—even though “good” people sometimes do “bad” things.

Leaders inspire to what?

On Thursday August 17, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ran the following news story:

“The New South Wales Transport Minister, John Watkins, has released a detailed list of road closures and no-go zones for the APEC Leaders meeting in Sydney in September.

Most of the changes have been brought forward to September 4 because of the US President, George W Bush's, early arrival.

The Cahill Expressway off-ramp to Macquarie Street will be closed for almost the entire week. Mr Watkins says the proposed five kilometre APEC fence will run along Bridge, Macquarie and Phillip Streets. It will be 2.8 metres high and 1.6 metres wide. The barrier will be extended to cross half of

the Botanic Gardens and The Opera House from September 6.”

While threats to leaders are not new, what is new is the unprecedented security that prevents ordinary people from going about their ordinary daily tasks. When an entire city must be disrupted to accommodate so-called “leaders” then it is critical that we examine what the “leaders” have done that causes them to be under such extreme threat. To the best of my knowledge, never before in Australian history has this extreme in security been taken for any leader no matter how important he or she may be.

Clearly people such as George W Bush have created a world that is more insecure and dangerous than has any other world

leader in history. They are inspiring people to hatred and violence rather than to peace and security.

The truth is that, immediately prior to the invasion of Iraq, that country was no threat to the USA, Australia, or indeed anyone even in the Middle East. Today it is the nurturing place of terrorism and the policies and practices of the USA and her allies are totally to blame. Sabre rattling in regard to Iran so as to further the neoconservative political agenda does absolutely nothing to ease the situation.

Good leadership inspires people to do good things. The security over-kill for APEC indicates that the authorities believe current leaders are inspiring people to do bad things. What does that tell us about them and their leadership?

A positive environment

My research (*Leaders: diamonds or cubic zirconia—Asia Pacific leaders on leadership*) made it clear that the primary function of a leader is to create an environment in which people can achieve desired re-

sults—consciously setting people up for success rather than allowing success to be a random variable. Central to this concept is that leaders have a responsibility to work for the good of everyone

rather than following agendas that ensure only a select few will benefit.

The current fiasco around APEC indicates to me that our current crop of leaders are failing dismally in this task.

“It’s the economy, stupid! or, perhaps not!”

This issue of leadership and the creation of an environment in which everyone can succeed is especially pertinent as Australia faces a federal election in the next few months and as the USA faces presidential elections in the next year or so.

Margaret Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister of the UK famously said “there is no such thing as society” and it appears that this is the emphasis that emerged at least in the USA and Australia during the late 20th century.

We are constantly reminded that “the economy” is central to our existence. In Australia, John Howard seeks to place the emphasis on how well the economy is doing and uses that to justify his re-election—especially in the midst of the current world financial turmoil.

Despite Maggie Thatcher, the truth is that society is important to most people. People want to spend time with their friends and families. People want to have time to relax.

The economy is important—but it should be a means to an end—not the end in itself. As the Bible says: “*what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul*”.

Leadership should be inclusive rather than exclusive. This means that each person is important—those killed as “collateral damage” in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places are just as important as our “leaders” most vociferous supporters in their home countries. We need leaders who support society—not just economics.

Focusing leadership energies

Today it seems that people are inclined to despair of the political so they seek refuge in the personal—to have as little as possible to do with public life and retreat into privacy. Yet, if we are really concerned about society, people need to become as deeply involved as possible in the issues of our day—as in the Vietnam era—which include the wars waged by the coalition of the willing, conservation, the environment, and local, national and international social com-

munity issues.

Clearly this may not be popular with those in positions of power.

Until relatively recently such concerned people could use legitimate peaceful protests to make their points in a way that virtually ensured politicians and other leaders saw and heard what was being said. Today that is far less likely. In Sydney, over APEC, it has been announced that the authorities will not allow protesters to go to

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any place that could “embarrass” the government by a confrontation with APEC delegates and the NSW Minister for Education has warned students against attending any protest rallies that have been scheduled. To me it looks like our leaders’ energies are being focused on the wrong thing.

Positive or negative?

When I work with organisations to develop their focus for the next 5 or so year period, I stress the importance of having a positive vision—something that will attract people to focus their energies on achieving desired results.

When I look at our politicians I find their focus on negatives—trying to

prevent bad things happening rather than seeking to get good things to happen.

There are too many people today who work from the premise that people are basically “bad” and therefore they need to be forced to do “good” things. This view of people seems to

drive our “leaders”.

My belief from observing human behaviour is contrary to this. Watching people from all walks of life in a myriad different situations convinces me that people are basically good—even though “good” people sometimes do “bad” things.

Quo Vadis?

So where should the focus be?

History makes it clear that world powers ebb and flow. The 20th century saw both the rise of the USA in world domination and the start of its demise. Events in the first few years of this century make it clear that the demise of the USA is gaining in speed—it has become apparent that the greatest military power in the world cannot defeat irregular forces fighting to repel invaders from their homeland. Additionally it is clear that, economi-

cally, countries such as China and India (together with a resurgent Russia) are seriously challenging USA dominance (already Russia has supplanted the USA in oil production.). Hegel's dialectic lives on!

Rather than “going with the flow” - emulating other “leaders” and countries, we in Australia should “dare to be different”. Our world will never change for the better if we just follow the crowd. We need to be more overtly, consciously and aggressively

different in what we do. As Australians we need to be unique and proud of it—and part of this uniqueness requires that we move away from an emphasis on fear and negativity such as the increasing threat of terrorist attacks (for which we, along with the USA, UK and other developed countries are largely to blame) to an emphasis on what things could be like if we showed true leadership in social as well as economic issues.

Then, perhaps, they will be emulating us!

For individuals, too!

And this is true, too, for individuals. It is not just our national leaders who need to change their emphasis.

The news at the end of August 2007 is that Australia has the least affordable housing in the English-speaking world. Interest rates may be lower than in the early 1990's but a higher proportion than ever before of people's disposable income is required for housing (rent or buy) and the numbers of forced property sales has reached almost epidemic propor-

tions—it is not just in the USA that the mortgage market is having an adverse impact on the economy—and on people's lives. A study released on August 30 shows we have an all-time (and totally undesirable) record proportion (9.9% in 2004 according to the St Vincent de Paul Society) of the Australian population living in poverty—yet we claim to be a pros-

We have an all-time (and totally undesirable) record proportion of the population living on less than 50% of the average weekly wage—and we claim to be a prosperous, dynamic economy!

perous, dynamic economy!

The challenge is for all of us to change our emphasis so that, through true leadership, we create an Australia for tomorrow that is better for everyone—not just we who are privileged—than the one we have today.

Guilt by association

Recently the Australian Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, argued that a person could be held to be an undesirable citizen because they were related to a person accused of a crime. (The Haneef case.)

I wonder how far this “guilt by association” should go. I see the evils in

the world today—violence, poverty, prejudice and all the rest—and I see them exacerbated by actions of our elected representatives through involvement in “the coalition of the willing”; through an emphasis almost exclusively on economic issues; etc and I wonder as to the extent that I am as guilty as them in perpetrating such

evils.

My personal belief is that the extent is high. If I see evil and fail to do something to stop it I am failing as a leader—I remain compliant through my silence. All of us can do something if we are really concerned about leadership. We don't need to be guilty by association.

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Making a difference

Recently an interviewer asked me to state my business/vocational mission. I replied:

“ To help people realise that leadership is not really about power and control no matter what politicians, captains of industry, academics etc may tell us. Leadership is all about creating and maintaining an environment in which people can be successful in those things that they want to be successful – in business this would be the achieving of organisational goals, in politics it would be about creating a nation where there is an equitable situation for all people and in which exploitation of people, resources, and the environment is actively discouraged. It requires taking a holistic approach to all areas of life in which one is seeking to be a leader – and that includes considering the long term impacts (both positive and negative)

of decisions made today – trying to avoid the trap of “today’s problems were yesterday’s solutions”.

Closely coupled with this is the need for people to realise there is a difference between leadership and the work of the leader. Leadership is a shared activity that has little or nothing to do with hierarchy, power and control – any person in any area of life can and should be involved in leadership. The work of the leader is the individual activity of inspiring and assisting people to achieve desired results.

As I work on this mission, most times I don’t feel particularly powerful – more like a voice crying out but not being heard. Despite this I keep on trying to get my message across – I guess its persistence – I can only hope it’s not persistence to a lost cause.”

This is the drive that lies behind these

newsletters. I am but one voice—and a very insignificant voice at that—in the greater picture. However I believe that if enough people care about leadership issues; if enough people are prepared to challenge the status quo and to point out that things do not need to be the way they are today; if enough people are prepared to nominate a different approach—then change can occur.

On an international level, I believe this means I must take every lawful option available to prevent the US invasion of Iran—a country that is doing nothing that contravenes its international obligations to use uranium for peaceful purposes—as well as pressing for the withdrawal of the invasion forces from such countries as Iraq and Afghanistan. We ought to be promoting peace and a positive future rather than the death and destruction currently occurring in so many places—and for which we are to blame by association.