

# INDUSTRY NEWS

## BE THE ETHICAL LEADER YOU WANT

The goal of achieving ethical behaviour is shared by families, communities, businesses and countries. Of the factors that shape behaviour, leaders are widely recognised as the most influential. As role models, they effectively set the ethical standards for their followers by the values they demonstrate, by what they say and do and also by what they do not say and do not do.

## DEVELOPING MORE ETHICAL LEADERS

It follows, therefore, that developing and nurturing more ethical leaders is very desirable. However, to realise this goal within the workplace there are a number of restrictive assumptions that need to be avoided.

A primary assumption, arising out of leadership being associated by a small group of individuals at the top of an organisation, is that leadership exists only in certain people. This approach denies the recognition that leadership exists at all levels in an organisation. It also limits leadership to the few, as opposed to shared leadership that benefits from many more sources of leadership.

This assumption also echoes the notion that leaders are born, not made, juxtaposing the opinion that leadership ability is largely determined by genetics and childhood conditioning against being able to develop leadership via experience, opportunity and teaching. While there may be "born" leaders, a focus on this ignores the reality that organisations cannot influence any of the factors that would generate more "born" leaders. Within the workplace the only option that exists is to focus on developing more effective leaders.

An allied view is that only a few select people have leadership potential. This has as a consequence a limited development focus. Only a few potential leaders are developed, rather than developing the leadership potential in everyone.

Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, articulates a further limiting assumption: that "when things are going poorly, we blame the situation on incompetent leaders [and] when things become desperate we can easily find ourselves waiting for a great leader to rescue us". This outward focus on someone

else to be the ethical leader ignores focusing on what the other members of the organisation are able to contribute. It also has the effect of minimising personal responsibility for exercising ethical leadership when the opposite would be ideal: that is, if members of the organisation took greater responsibility for being ethical leaders and role models.

Adding to these two arguments - that leadership exists in everyone and that shared leadership is optimal - is one further crucial point that centres on the distinction between ethical leadership and organisational leadership. Whereas traditional organisational leadership rests on an appointment by others - the CEO by the board or the departmental manager by the HR director - ethical leadership rests only on being ethical. It is a role that can be assumed and chosen by anyone without reference to others.

Paraphrasing a quotation attributed to Mahatma Gandhi that "we need to be the change we wish to see in the world" summarises the issue of ethics and leaders well, namely that we need to be the ethical leader we want and wish to follow.

## TOWARDS BEING AN ETHICAL LEADER

The traditional approaches to developing leadership include leadership courses, leadership development programmes, executive coaching and succession-planning initiatives, all of which can add value. To enhance the impact of ethics, all these initiatives should be underpinned by the following behaviours, which are core to fostering more ethical leadership.

- Understand and live your values,
- Live the organisation's culture,
- Comply with and support applicable legislation, rules and regulations,
- Follow the golden rule to do to others as you would like them to do to you,
- Lead to empower and support others, not just for self.

As good role models, leaders should enhance and uplift the ethics around them: in their teams, their departments, their businesses, their communities or their families. Giving greater effect to this as a primary leadership role and responsibility is a good start to develop more ethical leaders, both in number and quality.

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