



Last week I was asked (again) what I understood by “leadership”? My response... it’s personal.

If you google “leadership” you will get an astronomical 1,280,000,000 hits. “Leadership development” will result in over 803,000,000 hits. And if you googled “leadership development books” you could get approximately 522,000,000 hits. WOW!

Yes, a logical reason is that there are approximately 7,7 billion of us on earth! Honestly, I think it is more personal than that. Our views about leaders and leadership and the characteristics of strong leaders are vast. As they should be. There are certain skills that a solid leader should develop to be as effective as possible – yes. But how you come across as a leader and how others would describe your leadership style – that is unique and is shaped by your experiences, your environment and the exposure you’ve had to inspirational leaders, toxic leaders and everyone in-between!

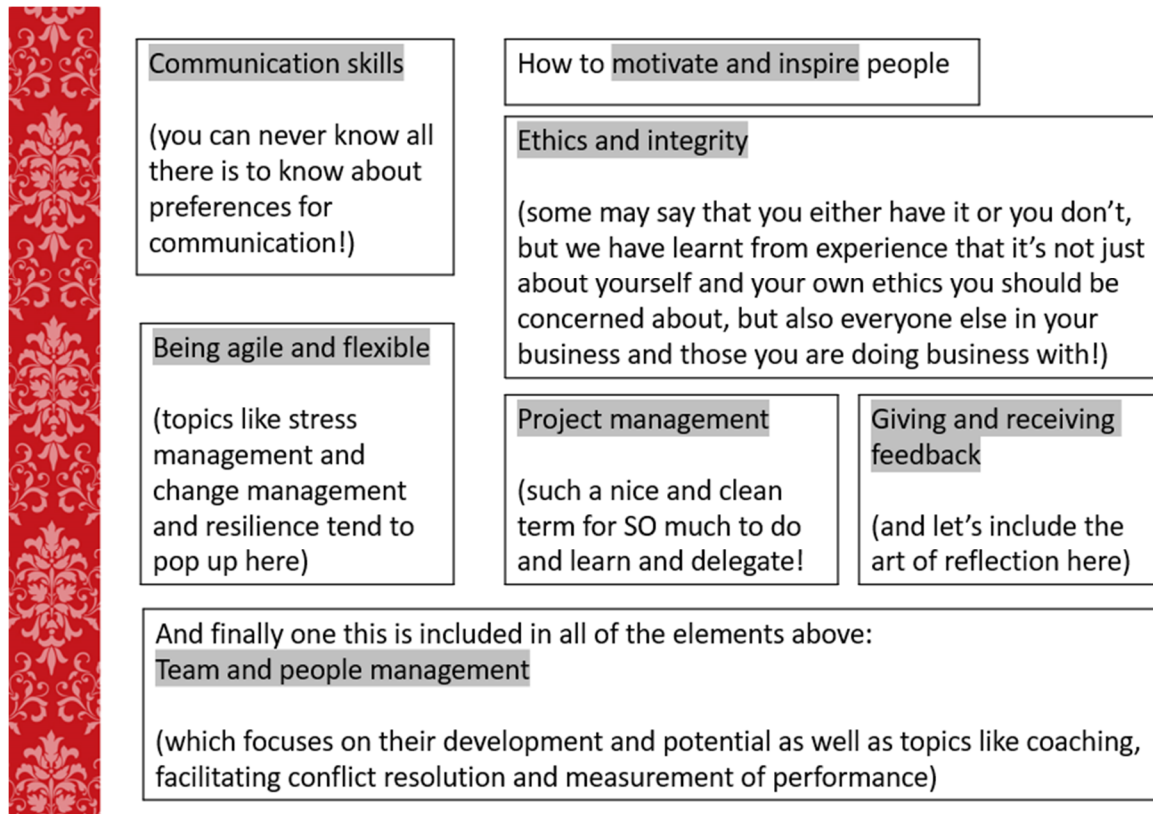
Does this mean that you are simply a product of your circumstances? No! It all starts with your CHOICE to develop as a leader and the EFFORT you are willing to make.

What are the basic leadership skills you want to develop? I always think back to the very first 360 degree feedback that was used to measure my leadership skills in the corporate world – The Leadership Practices Inventory by Kouzes and Posner at my New Managers Milestone in 2000! Kouzes and Posner provided information, based on their research from the early 1980’s, about leaders who could:

- Model the Way,
- Inspire a Shared Vision,
- Challenge the Process,
- Enable others to Act and
- Encourage the Heart.

Forty years later and you will still be admired as a great leader if you are able to demonstrate most of these for most of the time!

Your leadership development should definitely include these key ingredients:



And only once you have put in all the hard work to learn about, practise and accept feedback on these leadership skills, can you sit back to reflect on your unique leadership style where you combine your version of these skills with your genuine intent of guiding others to achieve something great! Oh, and here it gets to be very, very personal.

What influenced my personal leadership style had a lot to do with a very strong sense of “doing the right thing”. From as young as I can remember, I felt the responsibility and the need to distinguish between right and wrong and then ensure that I do what’s right or good. I discovered that doing this was not always that easy or as the wise Dr Seuss said in “Oh, the places you’ll go”: “Simple it’s not, I’m afraid, you will find...”. Which weighs heavier in terms of “doing the right thing”: being confident vs. being modest and humble? Both of these are seen as positive attributes. And who are you to say what is ethical in the workplace, sitting in your comfortable office as opposed to the person who is alone in a dirty, foreign airport with a very unfriendly airport official suggesting that \$50 may assist you to board your plane or else you would need to be detained for an unforeseen period of time? Is it still correct, or “the right thing” to say “but I didn’t know” if you really should have known or at least asked the question? “Doing the right thing” also became complex just like most other leadership skills such as building trusting relationships that last. That was another lesson that influenced my personal leadership style – trusting relationships. Or rather witnessing and experiencing the painful consequences of dishonesty or the withholding of facts. It made me want to go in the complete opposite direction – truth. Honest opinions and providing truthful feedback? Sincerity or nothing.

I recently experienced another life changing event. Saying goodbye to the corporate world after 23 years to start my own business. I get the feeling my next lesson in leadership is about to start...