

The leadership thing!

Kevin Lohan

I subscribe to a regular magazine which provides a summary of contemporary thinking on leadership development. I am, however, starting to notice a sameness to all of the advice being offered. Take just the last three issues for example:

Metaphors abound

Prodigious author, Chip Bell chimes in with two gems when in two separate articles, he exhorts us to consider 'leaders as fire starters' and then as 'bridge builders'.

Others, including the respected Warren Bennis, have suggested that we could learn about leadership by comparing the role to:

- Working in a crucible,
- Making magic,
- Extracting Gold,
- Making movies,
- Diplomacy, and
- A motor racing pit stop.

It doesn't end at one metaphor per article either. Jacqueline Byrd manages to boldly assert that we should remove the stop signs and use the keys. Sheesh!

Packaging leadership tips

Steven Covey, you have to answer for all the authors who have decided that they can package their ideas with a bite-sized chunk of numbers. At least there is an attempt to differentiate from Covey's 7 habits. Try these tips from 4 articles:

- 7 deadly signs of disease in aging organisations,
- 10 common myths of coaching,
- 6 core competencies, and
- 4 types of talent.

Learning from the best

If I want golfing lessons I would consider suggestions from Tiger Woods. But for leadership ideas, there might be better authorities. That does not stop an avalanche of suggestions about learning from any number of long-dead plutocrats, autocrats, dictators, and sundry czars, tyrants and

despots. Why, even people who have never existed are being offered as role models. Steven Segal (no, not him – another Steven Segal) suggests that we can 'Take a lesson in leadership from Tom Sawyer'.

Adding weight to his chances of publication, Jerry Manas has managed to get a bit of Covey's inspiration into his dictatorship role model when he advises that we might take on board his '6 tips from Bonaparte'.

The way things are going, one piece of leadership advice will immediately cancel out another. It is only a small step for Chip Bell after all, to make the connection in his two articles and claim that if leaders will just become fire starters and bridge builders, then if their 6 tips from Bonaparte don't work they can burn their own bridges.

Amongst all of this rhetoric, an unlikely source of wisdom came to my attention.

U.S. construction company, Kitchell Corp. has created a leadership development program simply called 'Vision 2010'. Their plan is to 'recruit intelligently, train thoroughly and establish performance measurements'.

With that kind of plan I don't expect they'll be published in the latest leadership journals but I would back their future. They've been around for 50 years and I expect that they bring to leadership the same kind of no-nonsense pragmatism that they bring to pouring concrete footings and building formwork.

Maybe they could get a gig on the leadership circuit with an article titled "Building 7 magic leadership competencies from the ground up – just like the pharaohs."