Developing Leaders
Executive Education in Practice

Leadership Beyond the Hype
Michigan's John Branch

Social Networking = Better Working
Columbia and New York Fire Department

Up-Scaling at CCL
Dave Altman VP MENA Interviewed

The 'I' of Leadership
LBS's Nigel Nicholson

The Companies that Grow their Own
RBL Reveals How the Top Companies Develop Top Leaders

Feeding Curious Minds
IEDP Ideas for Leaders

www.iedp.com   **iedp**

Seeing, Being and Doing

New Ways to Develop Leaders

In his new book, The 'I' of Leadership, Nigel Nicholson presents a totally new view of leadership through a fusion of evolutionary science, ego psychology, and management science; grounded in his decades of developing executives and their organizations.

Developing Leaders

Ask any boss you admire how they learned how to lead and they will say two things – they had a mentor or role model, or they were thrown into some project or assignment where they just had to get on with it. I am afraid you will find it vanishingly rare to hear them say: "I was carefully selected by an exhaustive and rigorous process, sent to the best business school, groomed by a succession of hand-picked roles throughout the company and then placed in a slot ideally suited to my talents."

Let me put it even more starkly. Some companies use the 'Blue Chip' management development strategy. They scour the Ivy League campuses for 'talent', recruit them with exalted visions of future promised worlds and then ruin them with bad experience. As a wise man remarked, hope makes a good breakfast but a lousy supper. This is equivalent to going to a deli store, buying the most expensive stuff – foie gras, caviar, and truffles – sticking them in a pan and boiling them until they taste like vomit. The alternative is the 'Ready, Steady, Cook' method. This is a daytime TV show where a member of the public is given $10 to buy cheap everyday foodstuffs – lentils, carrots, corned beef – and hands them over to an expert chef who transforms them into a tasty feast. In management this is the equivalent of the firm whose culture enables it to punch above its weight, or in sports it is the team with no star players that can outperform the richest clubs.

Strategies for Change

Consider the diagram.

The 'I' of Leadership

SEEING — BEING

DOING

By Nigel Nicholson
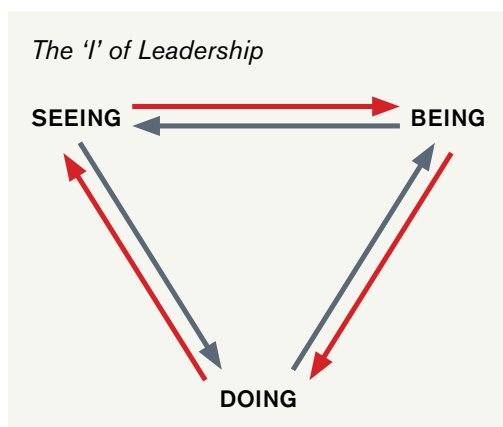
It shows the total interdependency of the three fundamentals of human existence. Every sentient organism has in its *Being* a bunch of goals – planted there mainly by evolution that will help it to survive and reproduce. It has a range of sense organs, in humans largely visual, *Seeing*, by which it apprehends the world. And it has a repertoire of actions, *Doing,* to close the gap between what it sees and what it wants. This is the engine of adaptation that enables all organisms and organizations to survive.

Self-guided discovery works best, which is why assignments are a powerful developmental tool

Let us apply this to leadership. It presents a quite different view than you will find in the literature. We all know that leaders with strong leadership qualities – the Being part – people like Steve Jobs, Margaret Thatcher, and Jack Welch – see the world through the lens of their identity, and act according to their instincts. Seeing and Doing are shaped by Being. If you try to change the Being part – the character and qualities of such people – you are doomed to failure. Yet all three of these people went on powerful and distinctive personal change journeys. How did this happen, for it holds the key to leadership development? If moulding someone's identity (Being) does not work, how about shaping their actions (Doing)?

Doing is an engine of change, but a slow way. Young people experiment with experience to see what turns them off and on. Many leaders only discover their leadership taste and talents by trying things out. "How do I know what I like until I see what I do" you might say. Forcing people down tracks of "Doing" by rules, metrics and incentives can change hearts and minds as they get used to the feeling of doing different things, though it may also just reinforce their taste for the tried and tested. Self-guided discovery works best, which is why assignments are a powerful developmental tool. Thatcher found she could easily shape the political agenda of less convinced people around her. Jobs discovered his instincts when fine-tuned could have enormous impact. Welch found how he could

" I want people to see me as the leader of a jazz orchestra… not to be better than any of the players, but… helping them combine to produce a great performance."

unleash power by freeing people to act. But all of these cases were more matters of discovering what was lying latent in these people than developing something new. Of course this is really important in leadership development, but what if we want to really transform someone? Seeing is the path.

Margaret Thatcher's leadership vision was certainly a product of her inborn character, but it was given shape and form by what she saw when growing up – the struggles of her father as a small-town businessman raging against bureaucracy, interference and restrictive norms. Steve Jobs went to India and had a revelation about the relationship between technology and design. Jack Welch witnessed the results of his own early transformation of GE and concluded that a new model of the boundaryless organization and his own leadership approach was needed. Seeing is the only way that deep personal change can come instantaneously and is the key to all kinds of personal development. Seeing drives new ways of Doing and alters key parts of Being. It changes a person's vision and their priorities, like the blinding awareness of Saul on the road to Damascus. People do not change people. People change themselves.

The greatest gift we have as humans is self-awareness. It gives us a powerful and unique capacity to change our goals and purposes by willpower alone. We can stop, reflect and decide that something is less or more important just by choice. This is how people get to quit smoking, fast, meditate, plan, resist temptation, and build things that last. It is rare that we do this purely by reflection. We need a stimulus. Vision – what we see – does this.

The business world has survived a significant sea change in the post-financial crisis world. But for our leaders to be ready for the challenges that still lie ahead, we need to train leaders in seeing as an art and a discipline, and then support them in their self-steered transformation.

On-boarding and the Hazards of Hierarchy
Something goes terribly wrong with hierarchy in many organizations. Chains of command are wonderfully efficient in getting controlled outputs down the line with a degree of precision, but they are often less good at feeding intelligence back up the line. This, by the way, is a serious problem for those who desire organizational agility. But what is at first sight more puzzling, is our strange attraction to the hierarchical pyramid model, even when it is not the best way to organize; as anyone from firms like Google and Facebook will tell you. We persist with them when manifestly they are not the best way. Why? The answer is, because of the dictates of our biology.

Linear hierarchical status systems appeal to our primate natures. They are pecking orders in disguised form, mimicking the dominance hierarchies we can see throughout the animal kingdom, and especially among our closest cousins, the primates. Rather than seeing this model for what it is we pretend it is free market, largely because it stages periodic tournaments that allow the most talented to advance to higher levels. This system only works so long as true value is signaled and measured, which is more or less the case in the animal world where the strongest and most resourceful win.

What we have is a false meritocracy because:

1. Quality is not so easy to measure, and even the most sophisticated methods we use are not reliable. The interview is especially suspect as a method for assessing quality.
2. A lot of the tournaments are not settled on measurement at all, but on someone's subjective judgment, or by a candidate getting enough votes – an election in other words.
3. It is questionable whether we can actually arrange people in a linear pecking order according to their quality. In the human world, multiple qualities count, and it is absurd to reduce individuals to a single quotient (yet, our biology makes that a very attractive illusion).
4. If you promote on performance you are promoting on yesterday's quality not tomorrow's, sometimes called 'the Peter Principle' (people are promoted to their level of incompetence). In other words qualities only have value to the degree that they fit a situation and meet a challenge.
5. Tournaments in the middle ranks may eliminate or put off the people who we really want at the top who have qualities that do not do well in some of those contests (many women for example).
6. If we really operated a pecking order, people would move down as often as they move up, which manifestly does not happen.

We are operating what I call 'a false theory of meritocracy', pretending that superior people hold superior positions. This might not matter if everyone recognized it as a game – a game that boys are especially fond of playing – except that, many people either believe it is true or it should be true. This is an idea that messes up their minds and leads to a lot of bad behaviour, including gaming the system. Oh yes, and another not inconsiderable thing: it seriously disadvantages women.

Here is how this ideology becomes a pathology:

*   Leaders who believe they are superior develop an attitude of defense and feel threatened by up-and-coming leaders who might beat them down.
*   Leaders who believe they should be better than they believe they actually are to

merit their standing in the hierarchy, will try to retain their positions by dysfunctional behaviours. Among these are dominance, overwork and relentless 'busy-ness' to prove their worth.

- Subordinates who believe they are too good for their lowly standing in the hierarchy, and feel they are of higher quality than their undeserving boss. This can motivate them to be uncooperative; sabotage the boss at every opportunity; and be the first to spot and point out the boss's weaknesses when they screw up.

Human resources management systems, with their KPIs and elaborate appraisal systems, often sadly do little more than dignify the false theory of meritocracy. Chief amongst these is the pretence of elaborate evaluation when the final call is the subjective judgment of some senior person or group. In too many merit-obsessed organizations there are managers spending 80% of their time 'performing' and only a fraction of the remainder solving the problems of the people who report to them.

This challenge needs to be met head on at the first managerial appointment. There are horror stories of youngsters in their first line-management roles acting like tin-pot dictators because that is what they thought was required – that they should prove their right to lead by displays of authority. Instead they need to cultivate a quite different perspective. The healthy stance to take is:

"I got here by a mixture of luck, help and ability, but it hardly matters. What is important is that I understand that I have a distinctive role in relation to those who are in my charge. It is to help them be the best they can be via Seeing and Doing, rather than getting hung up on Being. My job as the boss is to be extra eyes and ears – to see what reports cannot, especially the bigger picture – and to be a role model, to help others see what the responsibility of managing really means. I want people to think of me as the leader of a jazz orchestra or the director of a theatre company – not to be better than any of the players, but to render them the service of bringing people together, showcasing their talents, and helping them combine to produce a great performance."

Rules for Leadership Development

A large number of principles and rules of thumb emerge from my analysis. Here are some of the most important for leadership development.

1. Think 'Seeing'
The real meaning of 'vision' in leadership is what the leader sees and what she or he helps their people to see.

2. Take charge
Leadership is about shaping reality – often by altering how people see things. Leaders need to climb out of the bubble we call accountability and take it as their duty to shape their organizations, groups or business units.

3. Serve
Don't let people get hung up on ego, but cultivate the mentality of leader as servant to the organization as a community. This means building an ensemble – like a jazz band – where everyone can improvise and support, within the basic harmonic structure of roles and rules.

4. Discover
People don't know themselves as leaders until they try. Encourage them to expose themselves to different challenges and to find out what ways of leading work best for them.

5.   Know yourself – Control yourself

Help talent to embrace feedback and self-knowledge, and to cultivate a climate of openness and learning. This needs to be coupled with the discipline of self-control, especially to empower rather than meddle. Nose in, fingers out, is the ideal.

6.   Challenge reality

Leaders need strategies for interrogating reality, by talking to the people whose voices are least often heard; to be unafraid to push back on the received wisdom and come to their own view of the challenges.

7.   Be a Culture-carrier

Culture is the only inimitable source of an organization's competitive advantage. Help leaders to see how they can make their group, unit or business into a place where people feel they can be themselves and do their best work.

8.   Build relationships

Make sure leaders – especially those with hidden insecurities – don't fall prey to the "lonely leader" syndrome. They need to cultivate what I call 'Critical Leader Relationships' – confidants who will challenge, support, tell the truth, give insights, and help.

9.   Decentre

We are biologically programmed to see the world from a quite self-centred perspective, but the best leaders know how to break through this and see what the world looks like through the eyes of others. There are techniques for doing this, none more powerful than the most undeveloped skill in management –asking questions.

10. Tell the story.

It is the leader's duty to help people make the connection between past, present and future. They need to develop four essential stories: a) who am I and why I am here; b) who are we and what do we stand for; c) where are going and why, and d) why we must change. The first story is the most important and unlocks all the others. It is the leader's personal narrative as a value proposition for followers. It is the essence of effective leadership.

Nigel Nicholson is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at London Business School where he directs executive leadership programs including High Performance People Skills, and the unique Proteus Program. To see what people are saying about his new book and to view sample chapters, videos, and blogs visit www.iofleadership.com.

He will be discussing the art and discipline of self-transformation of leaders with Ian, Lord Blair of Boughton, the former Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police at London Business School's Global Leadership Summit (http://gls.london.edu) on Wednesday 20th May, 2013

Despite much discussion about the need for leadership development in corporate and public organizations, and the considerable industry that surrounds it, this is the first authoritative periodical focused entirely on this area.

Developing Leaders looks at the critical confluence between the provision of executive education and the real everyday needs of organizations to strengthen their management teams, their corporate performance, and their leadership.

The publication presents the latest thinking and most recent developments in both academic and commercial executive education provision worldwide, what it is achieving and which are the best models for success, sharing the experience and expertise of top leaders and world class educators.

Developing Leaders is published in both hardcopy and online "page turning" format. The quarterly magazine complements the IEDP website - the definitive resource for executive developers worldwide.

www.iedp.com

iedp