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The Leadership Series –

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We've been busy listening to how people have developed, learned and grown during their careers. As a result, we've collated a set of essays which we hope you'll enjoy.

The series is a set of anecdotes, eureka moments and learnings. Where people recall important happenings and moments in time that have stuck with them during their long and illustrious careers, things that might even have played a role in shaping their careers.

This month we're very grateful to Andrew Harrison, Deputy CEO, DixonsCarphone plc, for sharing his thoughts on life at the top of organisations, through a parallel with one of his favourite pastimes. Andrew joined Carphone Warehouse in 1995 as a Strategy Manager when there were 25 stores, and in the subsequent time has carried out several key roles including Commercial Director and Chief Executive. He also sits on the Board of Ocado plc.

As well as being a keen skier, Andrew is an optimistic and life long fan of Wigan.

(v) Andrew Harrison (August '16)



The Black Run

A keen skier, I often find I switch off when on the slopes- there is so much to concentrate on and my phone is often out of reach. The exquisite whiteness of the landscape feels like a blank piece of paper that needs an idea starting on - but maybe not just this week.

It's easy once back in the office to quickly forget skiing but I have instead always been drawn to the parallels of being a CEO. One often hears the words it's lonely at the top, I assume this is meant to signify a mountain, all of which have slippery slopes.

There comes a time in all of our lives when we must make a decision where we are ultimately accountable - what school, college, career, partner, but all seem supported by someone close. When you become As CEO you truly feel alone on your mountain - even if you know others could help, it suddenly feels very cold and scary. You now have the enormity of the organisation, the wellbeing of every individual in your hands scattered around the slopes below you like little dots, skiers on your slippery slope.

And let's face it, ALL slopes are slippery. Sometimes we think that nobody else has any challenges in their businesses, but look around at all the mountains around you, there is a CEO at the top of them all peering over an edge almost daily with the fear of God in him.

The only way down though as a CEO, it seems is a black run. Not just any black run but one which will throw up many unexpected challenges on its way - probably unpisted, icy in parts and deep snow in others. It turns out everyone else already got down on the easy greens and blues- that is all the easy decisions in your organisation got made by others, you get the tough ones and now the easy paths are all skied out.

The challenges you get at the top are generally these, the tough ones and I have had many - to close a business, to exit a territory, to buy millions of pounds of stock on instinct, to buy a business, to sell a business, to placate



angry suppliers, grumpy shareholders, to fend off the press, to face acute cash flow difficulties, to deal with strikes, reduce the headcount, to evacuate a building with rioters approaching. This is the black run and these are the moguls, the bumps, the twists and the turns. The terrain is hard, the weather is grim but you know ahead there is safety if only you can make the right decisions.

I think accepting you will need to do the black runs rather than resent them is the biggest lesson I learnt being a CEO. Of course it's comes with its trappings, but then you are always close to a fall. The steep descents should cause butterflies in your stomach, but what becomes apparent is you get to do the black run because you have done it before - you are not on the nursery slope, you left them behind years ago.

You got where you are through dedication, practice, hard work and plenty of falls. You picked yourself up from them and had the courage to get up again when others didn't. You can feel the snow, not just see it. You don't look at your feet but at the slope ahead as it develops, You use instinct and all your senses. You have to keep going even when your legs are burning and you can feel the wind in your face and the adrenalin pumps and your heart beats hard and fast. Whatever comes at you you need to adjust and adapt. You know where is safe to ski and where there are rocks. Then you can see safety, you know you can make it and you feel exhilarated when you do.

And of course, we are gluttons for punishment, because almost straight away we will want to go back to the top, and try something a little more challenging.

Reflecting on this analogy also made me certain of a couple of things. Don't feel afraid to have a guide. I have had a wonderful ski guide and also a business coach who has shown me the way for years. The right one is invaluable. Secondly - find others to ski with at your level, to help make the decisions easier. It's never as much fun skiing on your own as with someone else, but make sure they are the ones that help when you fall not the ones who ski past you.

Most importantly though, when you get the chance take a few blues and greens, always have a long lunch, and enjoy the après ski!



The next black run will be along very soon.

(iv) Anthony Simonds-Gooding (June '16)

How to Skate on Thin Ice

Progressing upwards in a career, one finds oneself increasingly skating on thinner and thinner ice. One becomes responsible for more and more, but one's knowledge becomes less and less. New coping strategies have to be deployed.

When managing smaller units, perhaps one could get away with being a Control Freak. But as one advances, becoming a Master Delegator is the new imperative.

200 years ago in Nelson's Navy, most Admirals exerted iron-fisted control on their Captains. Nelson acted very differently. He surrounded himself with officers that he trusted absolutely – and they him. This allowed Nelson to delegate and to send a signal to any one of them: "Proceed independently and do as you see fit".

His trust was not freely given. It had to be earned. It was not an automatic right. The journey was trust at first in small things, eventually working up to total trust.

In a delegated style of management, alongside Trust one needs to consider the issues of Risk. A business that is Risk Averse is likely to be dull. A



business that is Risk-Blind is likely to be bankrupt.

For companies with ambition, taking risks should be their modus operandi, to be encouraged and rewarded. The risk that does not come off should not be automatically punished. One has to be able to differentiate between an Honest Mistake and a Flaky Mistake. The former deserves an arm round the shoulder. The latter needs to be punished.

One notes with interest how large companies, and indeed Government, turn a blind eye to huge mistakes: vast IT systems that don't work; building huge breweries at the wrong end of motorways; a product launch that bombs; an acquisition that fails.

In contrast to this blind eye, often individuals, and even more often suppliers, receive extreme punishment for relatively minor mistakes, even if they are honest ones. One imagines that this is referred pain emerging from corporate errors. Even-handed it is not.

The average businessman is a rational being, happiest when weighing and measuring, a spreadsheet warrior, everything quantified and not a risk in sight (soooo..... not true). In contrast, increasingly, businesses rely on their particular personality and empathy to create a sustainable, competitive, point of difference. Only one retailer can be the cheapest. Lots of products wash whiter or clean cleaner. But it is the narcissism of small differences that count in the long term.

Creating empathy and emotional values is strategically the best route to creating differentiating and a strategic competitive edge. Doing this, in most cases, is not the strong suit of your average businessman. This is for him, where the qualities of delegation, trust and risk taking are vital. It is a hazardous business and therefore vitally important that he has the ability to judge between the honest mistake and the flaky one. If he cannot, then it is carnage.

Part of every candidate interview should probe the issues where there is no box to tick or cross: risk taking, making mistakes, trust, the emotional ingredients of the business mix.



(iii) Richard Hytner (March '16)

Leading From the Shadows

When Microsoft's newly appointed CEO Satya Nadella invited Bill Gates to become his 'consigliere', heads turned. Beyond those with an intimate knowledge of the software firm's 22 year veteran, the first question most leadership commentators asked was, 'who on earth is Satya Nadella?' The second and third were, 'why would Nadella want the founder anywhere near him and what is Gates up to?'

The questions hint at our flawed attitudes to leadership. If we haven't heard of the new CEO, has he got what it takes to be a good one? The new appointee to the hot-seat needs to have – and to demonstrate - a free rein, so he should clear-out all reminders of the previous regime. Fast. Surely, it can only be a hazard to hang around with the ex? This same flawed logic applies to those who enjoyed Manchester United's rapid decline in fortunes under manager David Moyes. They delighted at the continued presence in the stands of the club's former manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, asserting that there would not be a full recovery whilst the shadowy silhouette of Sir Alex, the ghost of glories past, hovered over the Theatre of Dreams. Had Moyes showed Nadella-like confidence, instead of ushering Ferguson enthusiastically through the door of the director's box, he would have invited Ferguson to sit next to him in the dugout. Moyes' stay in Manchester would have lasted longer than eleven months.



There are not enough Nadellas in our boardrooms and boot-rooms and, for the most part, our interest in leadership is limited to the one man or woman in charge. What else explains the almost exclusive organisational and academic focus on firsts? Where is the equivalent help for seconds? The top dog dressed as indomitable, all-conquering hero may have faded in business fashion magazines whose columns feature servant leaders, inward leaders, collegiate leaders and zen leaders. But in the world in which most of us operate, away from the business cat-walk, our relationship with hierarchy remains unhealthy and the code for the most part dispiritingly clear: you are a Number One or a Number Who, the supreme leader or a subordinate heeder.

Doubts remain in our deputies, advisers, counsellors, assistants, and our redeployed former chiefs. Are we really leaders? Even the best of seconds who liberate their firsts, and engineer successful outcomes for them quietly and effectively, continue to attract little attention and enjoy even less recognition.

My ongoing research into leaders from business, sport, the arts and politics provides role models for the *Consiglieri* who coach, counsel, anchor, advise, fix and deliver for the decisive leader. It also hints that a welcome C change in leadership may be on its way. The qualities exhibited by the most effective Cs - Consiglieri – ensure not just their vital contribution to the overall leadership endeavour but show the way for the As, the ultimately accountable CEOs. Beyond being the team decider, our As of the future will need to exhibit selflessness; create cultures in which candour is insisted upon, not frowned upon; coach colleagues; nurture them with oxygen and recognition; and promote a diverse team, every member playing as equals to their first. Successful organisations need to inspire more people to embrace these C leadership roles because they ooze their own kind of accountability, learning and joy and because from these positions leaders will demonstrate their suitability, or not, for the hot seat.

We find consiglieri who abuse this kind of proximity to power, from Iago in *Othello* to Frank (and Claire) Underwood in the *House of Cards*; or those, like Tom Hagan in *The Godfather*, who serve murky causes. But, for the



most part, these characters are the stuff of fiction and entertainment. Corporate consiglieri operate in more legitimate fields and skilfully, by choice, out of shot. Some of the world's most visible limelight leaders – COO Sheryl Sandberg at Facebook and Tim Cook at Apple - cut their teeth as consiglieri. Before becoming Zuckerberg's right-hand woman, Sandberg played support roles at Google and The World Bank. Yet how many leaders pause to reflect on what it takes to excel in the shadows? How many use it to improve their leadership skills, so that if they decide to have a crack at the top job, they are more rounded leaders themselves *and* better able to cast and coach their chosen support acts?

(Consiglieri: Leading From the Shadows was published by Profile Books in 2014. www.consiglieribook.com)

(ii) Tim Lindsay (October '15)

We all know what it takes to make a leader, don't we?

Everyone knows what makes a great leader. Leaders are big personalities, motivators, visionaries. They're the first over the top and the last to leave the field. They're brave, sometimes reckless. They're not afraid to take the big decisions, which is why they attract more than their fair share of the glory – and the remuneration. They are the personal embodiment of their company's ambitions. They have big egos. They live by the sword and often die by it too. They're like Rik Mayall's immortal Lord Flashheart, in smart casual attire. Right?



As it turns out, wrong.

Now most business books are pretty useless – you know the score, one half decent idea in chapter one, regurgitated and recycled for the next ten chapters (although one of my ex-colleagues got a very long way up the greasy pole by reading their dust jackets in airports and repeating the assimilated wisdom to clients). But Jim Collin’s ‘Good to Great’, which surely everyone must have read by now, is an honourable exception; and it has a brilliant chapter on leadership.

Based on an exhaustive study of companies that outperform their competitors and the stock market consistently over long periods, Collins concludes that truly great leaders have two vital characteristics; they combine deep personal humility with an iron professional will, subsuming their ego to the prospects of the company, valuing professional success massively above personal profile. They are modestly extremely determined; shyly fearless in their pursuit of their company’s success.

Collins calls this Level 5 leadership.

It may be counter-intuitive but, when one thinks about it, often the most quietly influential and successful people in our own professional lives have been cut from this cloth. He’ll blush to read this but for me Nigel Bogle absolutely exemplifies these qualities, and his agency hasn’t done badly over 30 years.

Of course, that’s not the end of the story, particularly in the complex business world we all inhabit. Leaders need to keep listening (‘nature gave you two ears and one mouth and you should use them in that ratio’) and learning. They need to surround themselves with the right people, always seeking to hire colleagues who are or will be better than them. They need to be clear about purpose and strategy, while having the courage and confidence to empower their people – both to get the job done and, occasionally, to make mistakes in the pursuit of excellence. But none of these things can happen optimally without Jim Collin’s two basic ingredients in place.

I’ve personally worked for my share of psychopaths, drunks and blow-hards, not to mention the ADHT afflicted, the deluded and the plain



incompetent. I'm also absolutely sure that some of the wonderful people I've worked with over a long and enjoyable career will have spotted some of these deficiencies in this writer. But reading the Collins chapter was truly a revelation for me. Despite the fact that it flew in the face of contemporary received wisdom (think Neutron Jack and 'Liar's Poker') it made perfect and immediate sense and had a profound effect on the way I tried to conduct myself professionally.

Let's hear it once more for personal humility and professional will. And Level 5 leaders everywhere.

(i) Paul Bainsfair (Sept '15)

Sch...you know who

Around about 1983, working at Saatchi & Saatchi, we made a TV spot for Schweppes based on the old Sch.. You-know-who idea. It revolved around the mistaken identity of Indiana Jones.

Two days later and basking in the glow of an unusually happy client, we discovered that the image rights we had paid for only included his hat. Peering down the barrel of a £250,000 write-off, I clutched my arse and went to tell the then joint chief executives, Roy Warman and Terry Bannister, the bad news. They were playing football in their office. They didn't seem too fazed.

Don't look so worried, you'll think of something,' they said. I had no idea what but I was pleased not to be sacked and their confidence was infectious. Putting an assured look on my face, I called in Dylan Hammond, the account manager.

Right Dylan, I've been thinking about this Schweppes problem, I want you to book a flight to San Francisco, go to Lucasfilm, see George Lucas, tell him what's happened, show him the ad and ask him if we can run it.' Are you mad?' You can't just turn up and see a top Hollywood Director. He's not going to see some random bloke from London"

He looked more than a little doubtful but a free trip to California doesn't come around too often.



With Dylan off on Mission Impossible I started rehearsing how I was going to explain to the Client that we had no film to run in the airtime booked for three weeks time.

Two days later Dylan phoned, “ I’ve seen George, he loves the film and says we can run it – no charge”

Looking back it’s easy to say we got lucky and of course we did but if my bosses hadn’t made me feel they believed in me I never would have even dared to try such a high risk (and expensive) solution.