

Two Faces to Leadership

BY STEVE SIMPSON CSP

A couple of months ago, I had a meeting with two managers from a company in preparation for a conference presentation I was to do for their people. The more senior of the managers (let's call him Bob) seemed quite aloof during the entire meeting. Bob didn't seem to be interested in what the other manager was saying, nor did he seem too attentive while I was speaking.

Recently I was at another meeting where each of these managers was in attendance. During the meeting, a very senior executive came into the room. Bob's whole demeanour changed instantly. He became much more animated, much more jovial, and much more engaging.

This kind of scenario is one that is played out regularly. Managers display a persona in front of their staff and in front of others outside the company (including suppliers) which is completely different to the persona displayed in front of more senior managers.

This is not something I had consciously considered prior to seeing Bob's two 'faces'. On reflection however, it's something I saw almost daily when I was a staff member in a large organisation many years ago. Interestingly, it's not something I've ever read about or heard referenced. And yet, I think this has a powerful impact on the culture within a team or a company.

In the previous edition of *Other Side Up* I talked about the power of UGRs® (Unwritten Ground Rules). UGRs are people's perceptions of 'this is the way we do things around here'. They drive people's behaviour, yet they are rarely if ever talked about openly. UGRs are created through observations of the alignment between what people say and what they do.

In a scenario such as the one I observed with Bob, some interesting UGRs could be created if that kind of behaviour was sustained over time. These include:

- Around here, bosses don't care about staff.
- Around here, the way to succeed in this company is to pander to the needs of senior management.
- Around here, the best way to manage people is by staying aloof.
- Around here, people are more interested in playing politics than in focusing on the real business of the company.

Seen in this context, UGRs can have a profound impact on individual and group performance. And this is as a consequence of there being two 'faces' to leadership—what is exhibited in front of subordinates and what is exhibited in front of colleagues and superiors.

This is further complicated by a further two faces to leadership. I call these the 'strategic' and the 'people' side to leadership.

In most companies, leaders are selected on the basis of their strategic potential. That is, heavy emphasis is placed on the leader's capacity to grow the business. In that regard, prospective leaders need to display a track record and/or a good understanding of key issues facing the organisation, market opportunities, economic and industry trend forecasts, and ways in which the team or organisation can differentiate itself in the marketplace. There is a fair chance that if a potential leader can demonstrate competence or expertise in all of these areas, that person will win a leadership position.



The 'people' side of leadership, in my experience, is often paid lip service. Many times, the need to empower people, along with the need to 'grow' people is referenced as an important leadership trait. But I would bet that on most occasions, if a selection panel had to choose between a person with strong 'strategic' leadership skills and another person with strong 'people' leadership skills, the former would win.

Part of this problem can be attributed to people's lack of understanding about the relationship of culture and strategic performance. Put simply, many leaders do not understand how a team or company culture can significantly impact on bottom-line performance.

However, with an understanding of UGRs, a bridge of understanding can be created that links culture and performance.

As an example, consider the behaviours that could be created from the UGRs linked to Bob's behaviour (above) that include:

- Around here, the way to succeed in this company is to pander to the needs of senior management.
- Around here, people are more interested in playing politics than in focusing on the real business of the company.

Any reasonable thinking leader would understand that UGRs of this type in an organisation would be counter-productive to good performance. It's that simple—let's face it...

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