

Leadership Made Simple

How to become a better Leader



Barry Walsh
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There are many articles that tell us all about leadership but not many that tell us 'how'. This paper tells us the how in a very practical manner, a manner we can adopt in our daily life both at work and at home. The practices proposed here are not new. They have been in existence for thousands of years. The difference between the practices proposed here and what you'll find in the latest 'improve yourself' columns is that they are not a quick fix. If you're looking for a quick fix then other sources might be more appropriate to meeting your needs right now. The practices proposed here are really quite simple however they are not easy to put into practice unless you are familiar with them. Familiarity will not be achieved by reading this paper alone; you will need to practice, that's why they are called practices! To practice you will need to be mindful. Mindfulness of such practices is not easy, especially in this very busy world we live in. However, you will have a stronger chance of being mindful first of all by making the decision first then learning to become mindful (explained within) and secondly by having a strong intention.

1. Everything we do starts with our intention. So why you want to be a better leader is something you need to think about or contemplate? (Quiet Contemplation Time; explained within)
2. What are the benefits to you and others?
3. How will being a better leader contribute to your goals?
4. Having contemplated this you can then make a strong determination to be a better leader.

By putting these leadership practices into action you will become a better leader.

Definitions

There are countless definitions of leadership; however I find my own definition most meaningful, maybe because I have contemplated a lot.

It is split into two parts:

Leading Self: *'Inspiring ourselves to do what we truly want to do'*

and

Leading Others: *'Inspiring others to achieve a shared vision'*

“the quality to inspire is the key to great leadership. Inspiring is not about acting from the outside in, it's about acting in an authentic way to bring what's on the inside out in ourselves and others”

The two parts of the definition come in this order for the simple reason that in order to lead others effectively we must be able to lead ourselves. Note the common word here is 'inspiring'. I feel strongly that having the quality to inspire is the key to great leadership. Inspiring is not about acting from the outside in, it's about acting in an authentic way to bring what's on the inside out in ourselves and others.

In the context of leading self then 'Inspiring yourself' means you are responsible for being inspired whether that be by yourself or by another. This is more about an attitude coming from your side. The same can be said for an attitude of learning; it comes from the side of the learner not the teacher. We cannot be 'learned' by another, we must learn ourselves. We can inspire others only if they have an attitude and willingness or openness to be inspired.

The Leadership Coin

The leadership coin is a means of modeling the two parts of the leadership definition given above. It

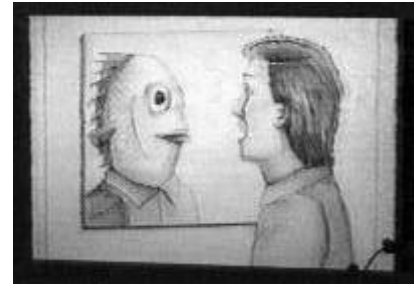


implies that one is not separate from the other just like the two sides of a coin. This is specifically the case in leadership of others, i.e. it is my belief that in order to lead others effectively we must be able to lead ourselves. However, even if we are only concerned with doing what we truly want to do (i.e. leading self) we need the help of others; we have and always will be interdependent. It is therefore an important quality to be an inspiration to others if we are to get support for our cause or purpose.

Leadership in an organisational context is about culture as opposed to individuals. A leadership culture is one where everyone is a leader at their own level, a culture where everyone is reaching their true potential synergistically in pursuit of common goals. Of course there will be a leading figure(s). This person's role is to lead and develop this leadership culture.

“in order to lead others effectively we must be able to lead ourselves”

Be Who You Are



Most modern schools of thought on leadership have denounced the notching up of common leadership skills or behaviours that we perceive in our heroic role models. The reason is simple; it doesn't work. What is promoted is that leadership development is more about self development. This paper very much supports this philosophy. *Be who you are*. You don't have to fit a rigid, pre-determined mold. You don't need to be discouraged because you don't have a personality profile of Jack Welch, Richard Branson or Bill Gates. You just need to discover your natural leadership style and develop it to its fullest potential. As the pioneering humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow said, "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself." Trying to be someone we are not is in conflict with this fundamental wish that we all have – to be at peace, to be content and have harmony. However, if we were perfect from the start we would not need development. So to 'be who you are' involves developing strengths and it also involves developing weaknesses; qualities you have or feel you should have but need to be nurtured.

What is it about a leader that inspires us?

Research carried out the UK in 2005 by the DTI (Dept. of Trade and Industry)¹ where they conducted interviews with over 2,600 workers across a range of companies about factors that would inspire them to follow a leader. From the research eighteen distinct attributes or traits were identified and consequently grouped into four aspects or 'dimensions' of inspirational leadership. These are:

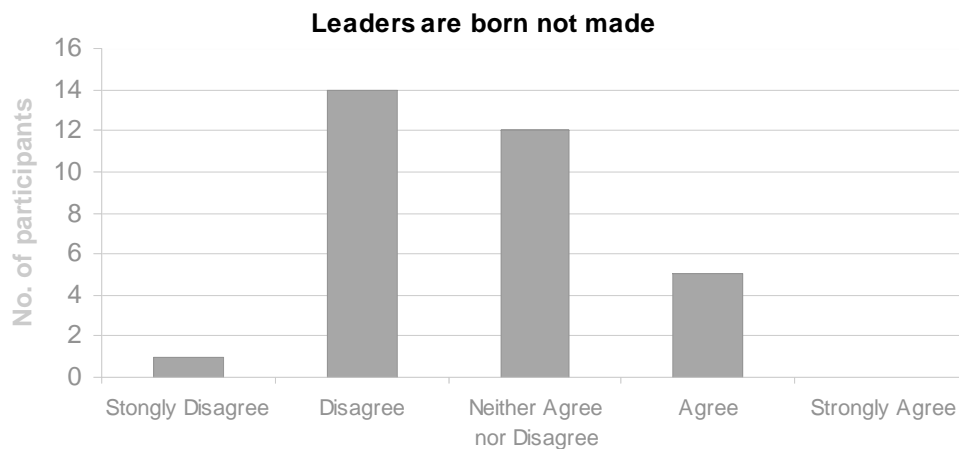
1. Creating the future
2. Enthusing, growing and appreciating others
3. Clarifying values
4. Ideas to action

This means leaders are inspirational when they can envision a future that is shared. They can enroll supporters for this vision because it has purpose and self growth for them and they get appreciated for it. There is also a clear set of boundaries within which they operate (values). Finally, the leader is an enabler, s/he can make it happen, and their supporters have confidence in this.

¹ Inspirational Leadership – insight into action DTI 2005

Survey

For the purposes of writing this paper a brief survey was conducted consisting of six questions. It was intended to provide a basis for discussion and an involvement of the readers of this document rather than to statistically ascertain definitive answers to questions that can only be considered as subjective and situational. Thirty two respondents took part from a wide range of organisations at different leadership levels. The following are the results followed by some of my comments:



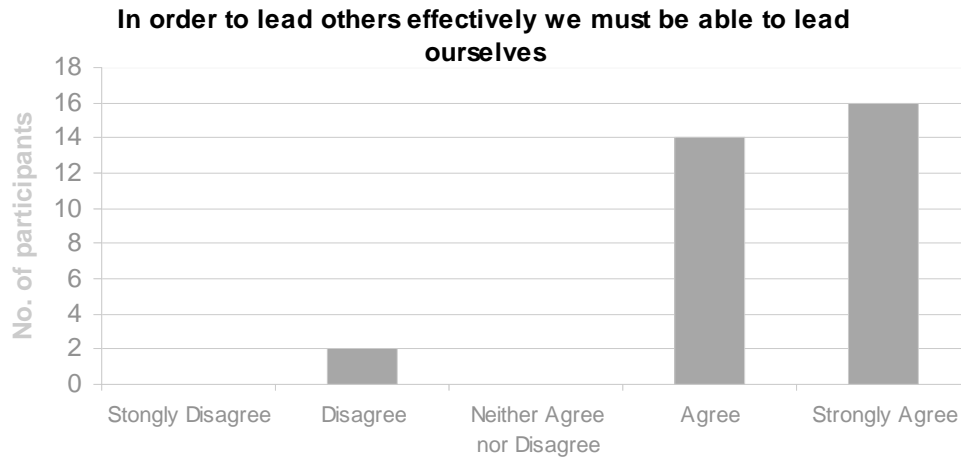
Almost half of the respondents (44%) believe leaders are not born but can be developed. Interestingly 38% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, most likely feeling that it depends on the person and contextual situation. No one strongly agreed that leaders are born, however, 16% did say they agreed indicating that they believe

leaders are born. This question would need further qualification to understand the thinking behind the answers provided. Sometimes when

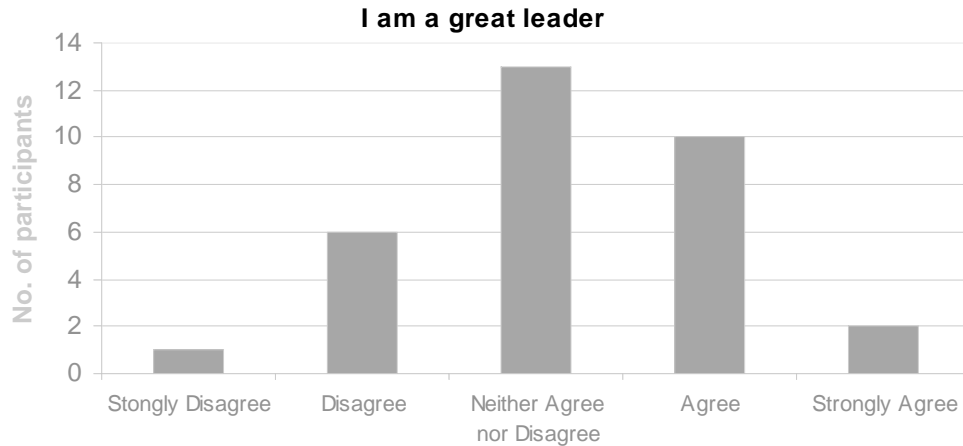
“everyone is capable of being who they are and of realising their true potential”

answering a question in this way respondents hold in mind a specific leader or group/type of leader that influences their answer. They may also reflect on a specific situation. My own view is that some people are born with more natural leadership qualities than others and that this is evident in the leadership role that they play. The situation also plays a large part in the leadership role. At the same time everyone is capable of being who they are and of realising their true potential. It is then a matter of finding a role that suits them best. On the ‘leading self’ side of the coin we all have the ability to

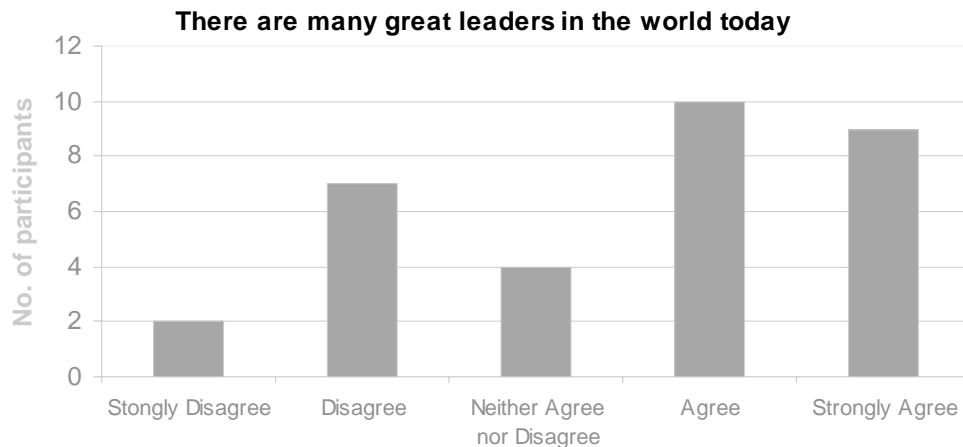
inspire ourselves to do what we truly want to do, and again some find this more natural whilst others need to develop existing and new skills to do this.



An overwhelming majority 93% believe that we must be able to lead ourselves first in order to lead others. If this were representative of all the population I believe it is, then the question must be asked why don't individuals and teams spend more time on developing this quality? Many leadership development programmes centre on leading others even some of those that propose leadership development is self development. To this effect I have developed a unique programme called 'Personal Leadership' (also known as CLARITY) whereby over a two day residential workshop retreat participants discover the real leader within; establish a vision for this leader followed by purpose, values, goals and roles. Just like a strategic plan for their business but in this case for themselves (a personal strategy). The result is clarity of direction and an action plan that inspires them to do what they truly want to do. In this way they become more authentic and become who they really are. It also provides for a balance in both personal and professional roles which is important for qualities like calmness, clear thinking, and decisiveness.

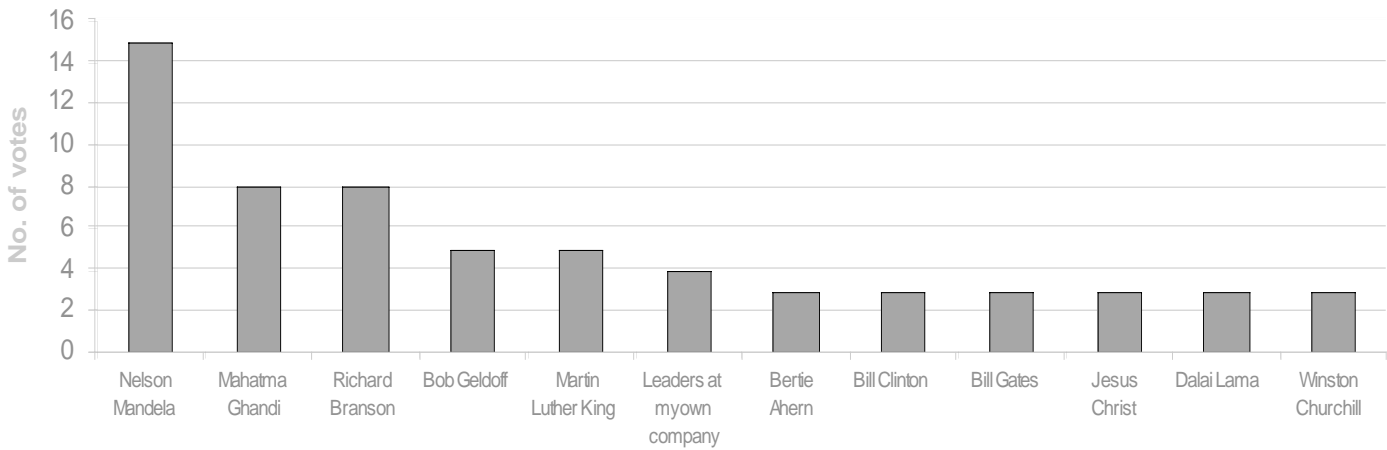


The answers to this question were interesting with 41% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. A certain degree of modesty is suspected here. However the result does indicate a degree of uncertainty with respect to individual knowledge of leadership capability. In this case of leadership of others it would be useful for ongoing assessment to use a 360 degree feedback process involving managers, colleagues, and direct reports. A good and well proven tool for this is the Leadership Practices Inventory by Kouzes & Posner based on their best selling book ‘The Leadership Challenge’.



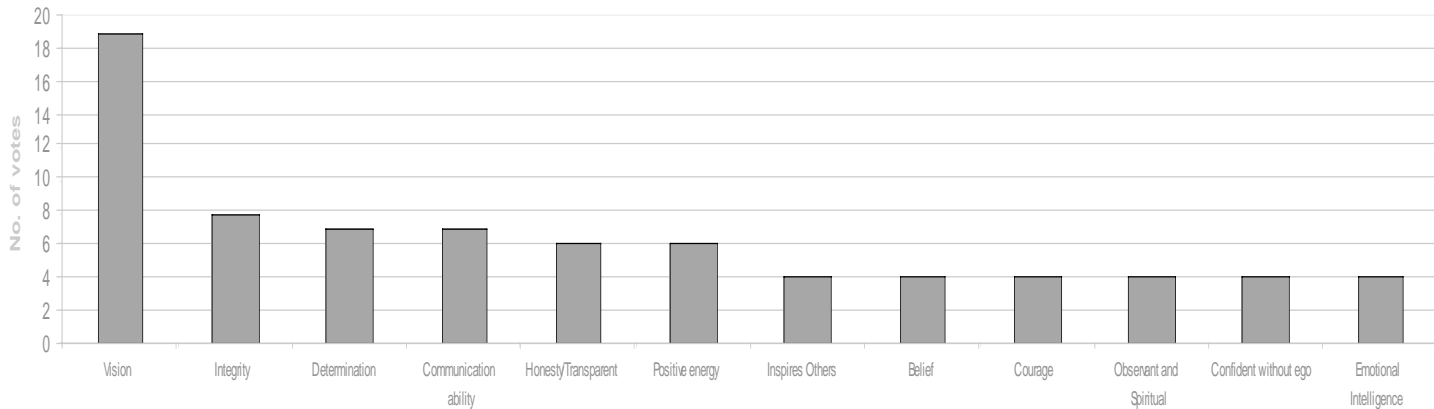
59% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Out of the top five role model leaders elected only three are alive today and one of these retired (Nelson Mandela) (who got almost 50% more votes than anyone else). Considering this it seems that modern day leaders are slow to come to mind or maybe they don’t believe many exist. As you can see there is a diversity of answers on this question and again it would need further investigation to understand more clearly.

Top Role Model Leaders



The chart above shows only the top twelve of a total of 80 leaders elected with 3 votes or more. Respondents were asked to nominate their top five role model leaders. The old favorites Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi top the poles with 24% of the votes between them. Richard Branson’s inclusion is not surprising, however recent media coverage regarding his challenge against Rupert Murdoch’s Sky TV coverage of the almost reopened OJ Simpson story looked to have influenced some respondents. It was encouraging to see that leaders within the respondents own organisations received four votes. Some respondents commented that they found it challenging to list five role model leaders indicating that great leaders especially within proximity are not very obvious; a worrying situation in these turbulent times. Another possibility might be that respondents may have felt obliged to list ‘famous’ leaders as opposed to people they know personally.

Top Qualities of a Great Leader



'Vision' topped the poll as the best quality of a leader with almost 12% of the votes and by 57% more than the next nearest quality of 'integrity'. The above chart shows only 12 of the 64 qualities mentioned. Interestingly the ability to 'inspire others' received only 2.5% of the votes. This compares with a survey conducted ahead of the 2005 Leaders in Sydney conference. It polled the opinions of more than 200 private and public-sector workers in senior executive or management positions, and found that respondents rate ability to inspire (47%), vision (23%) and communication skills (11%) as the three most single important attributes of a good leader². This goes to show how different surveys have different findings. However, between the three surveys discussed we can see that vision and communication of the leaders vision are important.

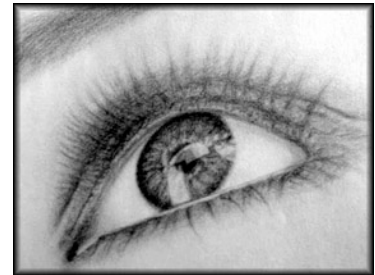
My view is that the ability to inspire is the result of qualities such as these, along with integrity/honesty, authenticity and positive energy as voted by the respondents in this survey. Leadership is almost like the result, or the finished product, it's like the baked cake after all the right ingredients have been mixed in the right way and baked at the correct temperature, and of course left to stand! (maturity in the case of the leader).

The remainder of this paper will look at how we can develop the qualities listed above and others that we believe are important to us. We shall focus on the leadership quality of Vision considering it was voted the top quality of a great leader in this poll.

² CFO. 01 September 2005

Vision

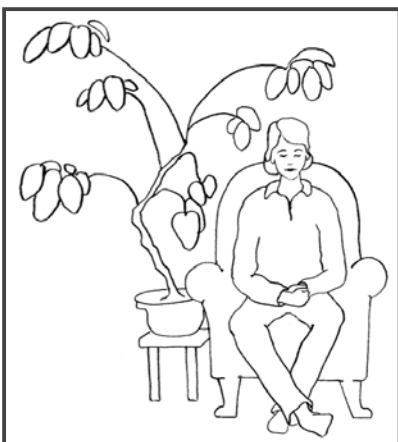
To have a vision for your organisation you must have a vision for yourself. To have the quality of 'vision' one must engage in much more than visualisation. That's just the starting point. Here are the steps I recommend you take to develop and enact your quality of 'vision'.



1. Quiet Contemplation Time

One of the main roles of a leader is to think, in fact in an organisational context this is what most leaders are paid to do. It's strange then to find that most leaders in this context do not take quality time to think, to reflect, to contemplate. If a leader does not take time to contemplate her/his own situation s/he will not remain objective. This is often the demise of many great potential leaders; they loose their objectivity after a short while in the role. To remain objective we need to take time to think, time to contemplate our own situation. In the context of developing the quality of 'vision' we can find some place that is quiet where we can develop a relaxed state using the many relaxation or meditation techniques available. We then contemplate what are the benefits to us and others of having a clear vision? How having a clear vision will contribute to our values and goals? Having contemplated this we can then make a strong determination to develop a clear vision. One of the many methods to develop our vision is to use what I call '*Beginning with the End*' - an age old technique used by many great achievers and masters.

“To have a vision for your organisation you must have a vision for yourself”



'Beginning with the End' involves imagining yourself having a conversation at a time in the future (maybe 10 years) with a friend you haven't met for a long time. Tell them (in the present tense) all about who you are. Note the *who* not *what* – you are envisioning the type of person you are; your qualities, state of mind/health, interests, involvements, etc. We then revert to contemplation and think of the benefits of being this person both to ourselves and to others. Benefits

are what motivate us to take the next step – to develop a strong intention.

2. Develop a Strong Intention

Not only do we use our quiet contemplation time to develop a strong intention we contemplate the benefits of achieving our vision at every available opportunity. We look for ways to develop this

“to develop a strong intention we contemplate the benefits of achieving our vision at every available opportunity”

intention. We might look out for others whom we know who have/are achieving their vision, try to get a sense of what it means to them. Why not seek out some of these people that we know or can get to

know and then talk with them, listen and learn from them. Alternatively we can read inspiring autobiographies that describe the turning vision into reality. We can also watch a movie, download a video clip (e.g. *“I have a dream”* – Martin Luther King) or watch inspiring short films. I have a link on my web page (www.peopledevelopment.ie) showing short films (2-7mins long) of ordinary people like you who share their story that will help inspire you to develop your vision. We need to find ways that suit us, ways that we like that will encourage us to develop this strong intention. We need to maintain this practice through the next step which is mindfulness.

3. Be Mindful

Mind-ful is just that, where your mind is full of the object of thought. We will become mindful when we decide to become mindful, then there we will create room or space in our mind to allow that thought to pervade. Many people do not have any space in their mind because it is so preoccupied with other thoughts concerning them as well as many distractions that do or should not concern them. Therefore we need to reduce the number of distracting thoughts to create space, to bring calm and consequently mindfulness of the things that should concern us like our vision. We can reduce distracting thoughts by living more simply. Examples that I use are, not to turn on the radio in the morning until near the end of my

breakfast or in the car just to get the news headlines. Some people are woken up by an alarm radio, not even giving themselves a chance to

“We will become mindful when we decide to become mindful, then there we will create room or space in our mind to allow that thought to pervade”

get their own thoughts together. I have also not had a TV for the last five years, yet I never feels I am less informed than anyone else – in fact it frees up time and mental spaciousness to do more

meaningful activities. We can choose our reading material more selectively, read what will contribute to our purpose, our values and our vision. The message here is to simplify not complicate, society has conditioned us to do too much of this over the years, why wouldn't it? It believes 'success' is dependent on 'more of', 'better than', 'more convenient', etc. The reality is that this so called developing world has only created a monster of complexity and busyness that seems to go against our fundamental wish for contentment and happiness.

4. Familiarity

We will become familiar with our vision if we practice the above three steps. Through this we will achieve such familiarity with our vision that we will become our vision. Our every thought and consequently our actions will contribute towards our vision. Through quiet contemplation we will become so familiar with the benefits for ourselves and others that our intentions and awareness of our intention will develop, we will seek out opportunities to increase the strength of our intention. By reducing distractions we will create space in our mind to become more mindful of our intention. This will consequently lead to a greater familiarity of our vision. Through familiarity of our vision we will become our vision. We are what we think.

Conclusion

Whilst leadership qualities may come more naturally to some it is not to say that we cannot develop our own qualities to their true potential. We can use these four steps to develop any leadership qualities we wish.

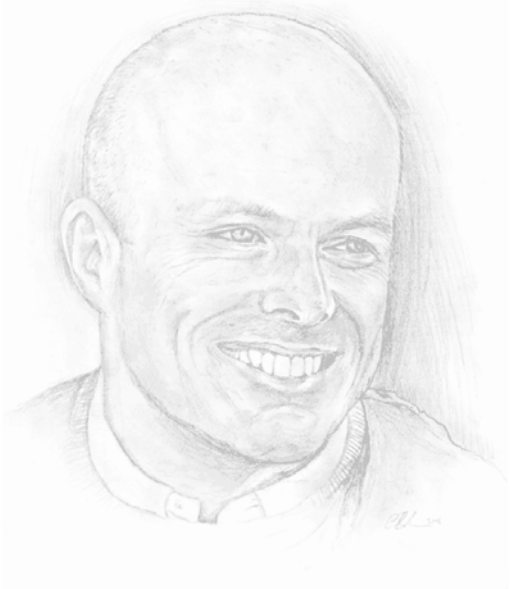


As was mentioned from the outset the practices proposed here are really quite simple however they are not easy to put into practice unless you are familiar with them. This is how we become a better leader of self and then others. We then become more authentic more true to ourselves. In this way we develop greater integrity. Along the way we attract others that will support us on our journey, we will find ourselves in circumstances that give us opportunities to grow, and we will create the good fortune (or luck) to achieve our vision for ourselves and in an organisational context to achieve a vision that is shared with others.

Believe and you will see!

Barry Walsh

“the practices proposed here are really quite simple however they are not easy to put into practice unless you are familiar with them”



About the Author

Barry Walsh is an independent coach and facilitator of leadership and strategy at work and in life. He established 'the people Development Co.' www.peopledevelopment.ie in 2004 with the purpose of helping Irish business leaders and their teams to realise their true potential in business and in life. He works with some of the best known names in Irish business mainly in the SME sector. Barry is also a founder director of Burren Leadership Forum which hosts leadership development activities, conferences and retreats for leaders across the globe to develop the leader within www.burrenleadershipforum.ie .

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