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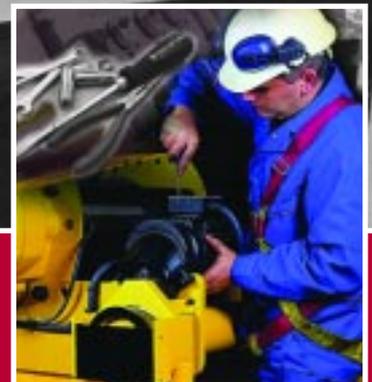


high profile

Reflecting on leadership: can you release the potential?

Annual Maintenance Report

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Reflections from the top

Good performance and great leadership are intrinsically linked. But what does a great leader look like? That's a question to which many businesses seek the answer. Chris Rowlands reports

Leadership is a complex issue: the question is often posed as to whether leadership is a 'skill' and if it can be taught. The answers are often more simple than first thought. And, interestingly, experts from different fields describe their thoughts on the subject of leadership with remarkable consistency.

Jennifer Rodriguez (left) is co-founder of Roundtable Consulting, a business consulting and coaching partnership. Having started her career in civil engineering, Rodriguez has worked as a consultant across the globe for a number of years. It appears that leaders everywhere face similar challenges. She sees that some working environments are "a less than human place to work sometimes" – particularly manufacturing companies, as they promote the endless drive for productivity, efficiency and to become more lean. And once politics is added to the mix, people can soon take their eye off the ball.

Politics isn't specific to manufacturing, says Rodriguez: "It's normal for any business, but when people focus on politics, its usually to do with job security, threats, and so on, which will then produce instability."

Leadership in these situations is particularly tough. Roundtable, rather than just implementing a standard set of skills, encourages different leadership techniques. The techniques employed, says Rodriguez, will depend on "where the person is in the story".

She firmly believes that, no matter what the sector, the overall picture of change is usually pretty similar. What is important, however, is that each business knows where it is – for example, if the situation is so bad that fear is driving everything, then leadership will be needed to contain the fear, to calm things down and to be objective and neutral.

"The skill to stage and manage change is crucial," says Rodriguez. "It's about individuals. It's about meeting people where they are, taking them across a bridge, and pulling on personal relationships when the leader needs help."

Forming this type of personal relationship, she says, is not about making friends with all the employees – cue sigh of relief from most managers, who would balk at the idea. Many leaders have clear boundaries between work and personal relationships, but as Rodriguez points out: "What is a relationship? It's a point of trust. When looking back at a person's own life, people who have inspired us – whether a boss, a teacher or a professor, for example – have all occupied that point of trust early in our lives, and so influenced how we lead."

A good leader pays attention to individuals, forming a relationship in this way, and the person being led feels comfortable that the leader has their best interests at heart.

Rodriguez underlines that there's a clear difference between managing and leading. Manufacturing is a highly competitive sector, so managers need the right systems and need to strive for best practice, but equally important is the fact that the people in these businesses must feel valued: "That is what the leaders must do. They have to help people find meaning in their work."

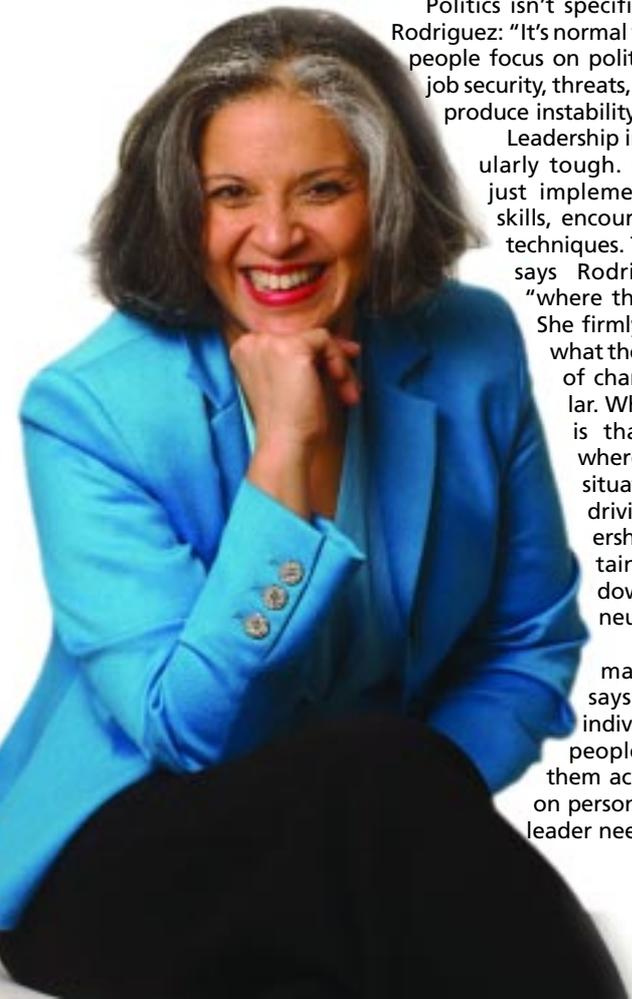
What about those who believe that leaders are born, not made? "You can't manage yourself into becoming a good leader," she says. "It's a complex phenomena, with many personal qualities and actions. But anyone can lead if they want to!"

Common thinking

Are leadership qualities transferable between sectors? Certainly, leaders across the spectrum do demonstrate commonality in the skills they employ. As Rodriguez reiterates: "We are all humans. But there are specifics, which arise from one's background and previous experiences of authority." And all good leaders must start with self-awareness. "Start with yourself," she encourages.

This paints a portrait of a good leader. The challenge for manufacturers is to ensure that the right mix of leadership skills are on the palette at the right point in the story. Gareth Edwards is senior researcher at the Research Centre for Leadership Studies, part of The Leadership Trust. He echoes Rodriguez, saying: "Everyone has the potential to be a leader." He adds that, at all levels in manufacturing businesses, leadership skills are exhibited that fall into two categories: transformational and transactional.

First, let's look at transformational leadership skills: these are the motivational and inspirational



abilities. These 'human' skills are generic across any business or sector.

The second set, transactional skills, apply to reward and recognition of people, and overall controlling behaviour. Edwards says some refer to these as 'management skills' – "but I'm not totally convinced."

What he is convinced about is the result of a research study, which he co-authored, in which leadership qualities at different organisational levels were examined. Edwards says: "A leader high up in the hierarchy demonstrates good transformational leadership." Lower down in the hierarchy, the transactional leadership skills are more prevalent. "Although it isn't necessary to have the transactional skills at the top, there is certainly a lack of transformational skills at the lower end," he says.

Edwards suggests that when a person transfers from one business to another, it will depend on the level they occupy in the hierarchy as to what skills they will need to use. Most importantly though, is for the leader to have "an individual self-development perspective. Be more self-aware, more self-confident, and more self-controlled."

To develop the human, or transformational, leadership skills, a leader must initially develop an understanding of how they themselves tick. And in any business, knowledge of the leadership styles that are required at that point in time is invaluable. Wherever a leader is in the hierarchy, learning and developing are clearly important.

Indeed, learning and development is vital, according to Dr Julie Madigan, chief executive of The Manufacturing Institute (TMI). TMI is a charitable organisation which has helped manufacturers to transform their performance for the past decade. Madigan is herself leading TMI to deliver 'An agenda for change', a programme for manufacturers in the North West, which includes a focus on managers, on spotting leadership talent throughout organisations, not just in the boardroom. "The word manager is often overused. People sometimes don't understand the responsibility that goes with it," she says.

Madigan's view is that leaders can't be taught – but they can be supported. In fact, for SMEs in particular, she sees this support of leaders as being "a defining variable." Leadership is so important that TMI is offering, together with Lancaster University Management





School, a new MSc in Manufacturing Leadership. The importance of leadership to small businesses is a message repeated by Peter Davies, development manager at Business Link for London. It offers AddMore, a new programme aimed at SMEs to help them boost profit and customer satisfaction through supporting staff training. What's more, for firms between 20 and 249 employees, up to £1,000 of training is available solely on the topics of leadership and management. Although the offer covers all sectors, there are nearly 1,000 manufacturing businesses eligible for this support. Davies says: "Previously, pre-prescribed leadership programmes were offered. But here, businesses have the flexibility to do what they want." He lists coaching, networking, conferencing and seminar skills as being part of the leadership portfolio, and a business can spend its allocated £1,000 on training in any of these areas. And it does not have to be in London. "If they see something anywhere, they can get it facilitated by this group," he says.

"The word 'manager' is often overused. People sometimes don't understand the responsibility that goes with it"

Dr Julie Madigan, The Manufacturing Institute

Size matters

But why leadership? According to Davies: "In this size of company, that is the one area where most impact can be made. Some people draw a distinction between management and leadership: although these both add value, honing skills to lead a successful business adds value to the individual and therefore adds value to the business."

Constant through these views is that whether you believe leadership is something we are born with or not, the development and support of it is absolutely essential. Recognising the need for this support, many options are available, which is good news for all manufacturers, large and small. But, as



is often the case, much value can be drawn from real examples of good leadership.

Adrian Boothroyd (below, left) is both a manager and a leader. Meeting Boothroyd for the first time, one can't help but be impressed by his desire to lead his people down the right path. "Realising your own potential is good, but realising the potential of others is awesome," he says. As a leader, Boothroyd demonstrates numerous skills.

First, he always ensures that everyone working with him has a common goal. He believes that skills are part of nature, but that nurture can be used, too – everyone can learn from others. He has learned a few things from others, both in and out of the limelight; he quotes Winston Churchill extensively, as well as Kenneth Blanchard of *One-minute manager* fame and even Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu.

Boothroyd is seen as the leader of his organisation. Although his boss, the CEO, has various departments reporting to him, outwardly Boothroyd is the more visible figurehead. Boothroyd also has a hierarchy beneath him, and is encouraging each of his department heads to grow their role as well. For example, his assistant is considerably older and has seen success at the highest levels already in his career, but in this role he still demonstrates a desire to improve. This is important to Boothroyd, who believes it's essential to have hungry and ambitious people around him; it's not seen as a threat.

Everyone in Boothroyd's organisation has their performance measured, and the whole group has one very clear measure, too. As leader, he's looking to "put a smile back on people's faces" he says. Echoing Jennifer Rodriguez, he says: "People want to be valued. We all talk about performance, and I listen and ask questions. I want this to be a learning organisation, one in which everyone contributes. I will guide, facilitate, and occasionally tell."

A group briefing from Boothroyd is both motivational and controlling. His team does what he says – and they enjoy it. Regardless of whether groups are working separately or together, Boothroyd's leadership skills are always at the forefront. He has respect for members of his team, delegating to them so that they pick up areas where his skills are lacking. And he allows them to get on with it. A change to the organisation's structure has recently taken place, and it's evidence of Boothroyd's talent that he's managed this change very well.

This is a clear demonstration of leadership skills, and is resulting in success, although modesty makes Boothroyd say that he's "done nothing yet". His methods do reflect those used in manufacturing, and the focus on learning and support is ever present. The human skills are critical, and Boothroyd is certainly becoming more self-aware. A great example of leadership in practice, one we can learn from, just as he admits he can learn from manufacturing and other sectors.

And what is his business? The answer may be a surprise. Adrian Boothroyd is the manager of Watford Football Club. ■

