

Investing in leadership

The path to growth

Leadership has no simple recipe for success. But there is clear evidence that those excelling in senior leadership roles are doing things differently. So, what do high performing leaders look like, and what do you need to invest in to become one?

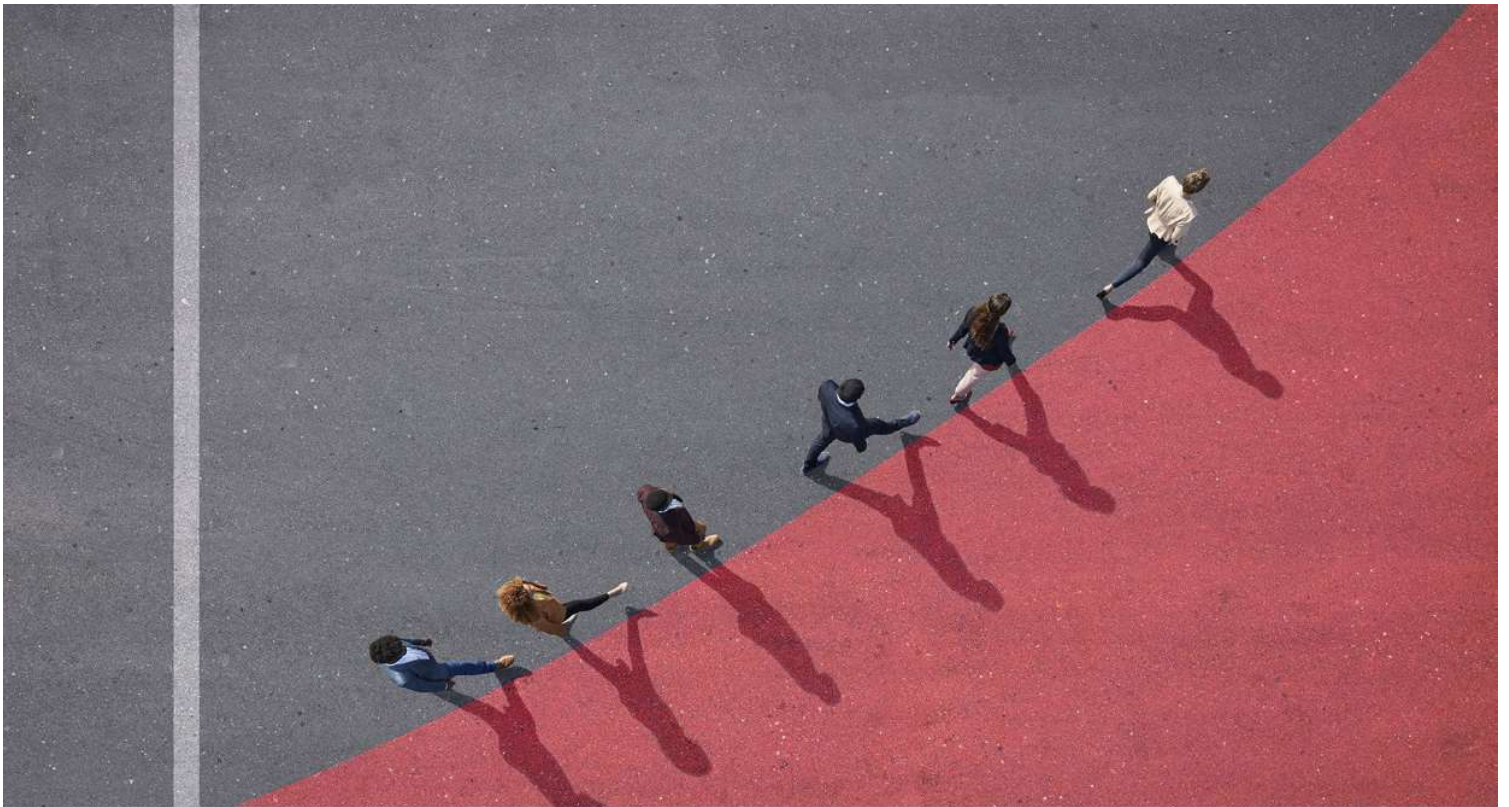


STORY

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“Before you are a leader, success is about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

JACK WELCH, *WINNING*

Leadership is a big topic, and there are countless books, research findings and opinions. Much is also said on the difference between management and leadership. Management has a role and has some similarities with leadership – directing, role modelling and advocating. But leadership is more about collaborating with and mobilising others. Leaders build a strong core team, establish a clear, compelling vision of what is to be achieved, and enable others to achieve that. Leadership also requires energy, which means leading by example, and motivating others, focus and empowerment.

Leading in times of turbulence

The rate of change is ever-increasing, and this has meant a real shift in effective leadership behaviours. Whereas once leading was focused around process, methodology and managing work, now leadership is about people.

The emergence of Agile has seen this further reinforced. Agile is more than managing process, technologies and work; it emphasises the focus on people (both employees and customers). More than a methodology, Agile is about people having a certain mindset in how they understand things, the way they work together, the values they share, and the manner in which they communicate with each other. In an ever-changing fast-paced world, leadership behaviours become particularly important. This requires a new generation of leaders that do things differently. They have different ways of working, goals, roles, behaviours, values and ways of communicating.

Leadership behaviours

So, what behaviours are crucial for leading in this fast-changing world?

It requires leaders themselves consistently embodying a new mindset in all of their words and actions, which requires personal commitment and organisational investment.

There are specific behaviours that leadership needs in times of uncertainty. Based on the work of leadership specialist, RHR International, these include:

Switching from strategic planning to scenario planning

By addressing a range of hypothetical 'what if' questions (e.g. what happens if our revenue drops 10%?) and identifying contingency plans.

Rely on the senior team

Utilise the best thinking from those around the table. Support each other but also hold each other to account. The success of the business is one of shared accountability across the entire senior team. This point is further reinforced in Patrick Leoncini's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

Think about your employees and meeting them where they are at

Employees will respond best when they are:

- Kept informed
- Remain connected
- Provided with guidance and direction
- United

Applying these behaviours to your leadership practice is crucial and will help navigate employees successfully through change.

Develop new skills

Leadership must recognise their gaps and then do something about building their capability in those areas. There is a need for a balanced thinking and decision-making style. To do this well in leadership, self-awareness is critical. A leader without

self-awareness of their style, gaps, blind spots and potential derailers will not be able to develop themselves. If you ask me what the most crucial trait in a leader is, my answer is always self-awareness.

Self-management

Building on the above, a leader must be aware of themselves, their stress levels, drive, stamina and overall wellbeing. More often than not, in the busy-ness of work and life, this piece is often not done well or happens too late. Think of it as "personal pulse-taking". A good coach, mentor or confidant is vital for a leader and can assist in this space.

"Mastering self is true power."

LAO TZU, CHINESE PHILOSOPHER

Last year I became accredited in The Leadership Circle[®], a tool that pulls together a range of research (including Cognitive Psychology and Stage Development Theory) into one integrated framework. The framework looks at a range of behaviours that can inhibit leadership (which need to be toned-down) and offsets this with a variety of behaviours that contribute to leadership effectiveness (on which we should be focusing on dialling up). By undertaking a process of self-awareness and shining the light on the underlying thinking patterns that drive our current behaviour or that of our leaders, we then have access to a whole range of new choices, possibilities and opportunities in leadership and business performance.

What this teaches is the importance of investing in developing courage.

The importance of courage

In a major study in the US, leaders were asked the question; “What does the future need from you?” and the number one answer was “courage”. Courage is an integral and important part of leadership. Change, disruption, innovation, and inclusivity, all take courage. Learning from mistakes and failure takes courage. Acting ethically takes courage. Getting the world we want takes courage. Having tough but honest conversations takes courage. Don’t be timid. Step up to the plate.

Another piece of courage is the courage to be you. Or in other words, authenticity. This is a trait that resonates with me in leadership.

“Clear is kind,
unclear is unkind.”

BRENÉ BROWN, DARE TO LEAD

Authenticity involves integrity. It involves knowing our own values and principles and ‘walking the talk’. At times it can mean a willingness to openly deal with difficult relationship problems – something that we don’t do particularly well in New Zealand, often opting for artificial harmony rather than holding an open, productive conversation. Ironically, team morale can be damaged by this approach – the very thing we think we are avoiding.

Listening also takes courage. Listening is proven to be the differentiating factor in performance, and yet many of us are guilty of not practising this skill. Effective leadership requires the ability (and courage) to think about others and consider their perspective, and we can only do this accurately by listening. Doing anything else is making an assumption, and these are often incorrect. Behaviour Coach, Louise Evans’ *Five Chairs Concept* highlights this perfectly and provides a framework for shifting our thinking and listening – check out her TEDx Talk on communication and leadership.

Finally, don’t go it alone: collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.

As 2020 approaches, consider investing in your leadership and that of your Leadership Team. Set about undertaking a process to ensure there is a real consciousness of leadership style, thinking patterns, values, unconscious bias and identify the leadership competencies that need to be toned down and those that need to be extended and grown. There are many tools and processes that can assist in leadership development. Longer-term leadership development programmes are particularly effective for sustained change. Other proven interventions include blocks of one-on-one coaching or assessment tools such as Hogan Assessment Systems or The Leadership Circle. Workshops with the senior leadership team or a team profile could also prove to be an excellent investment.

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If you are interested in leadership building initiatives, please contact one of the Baker Tilly Staples Rodway HR Practitioners.