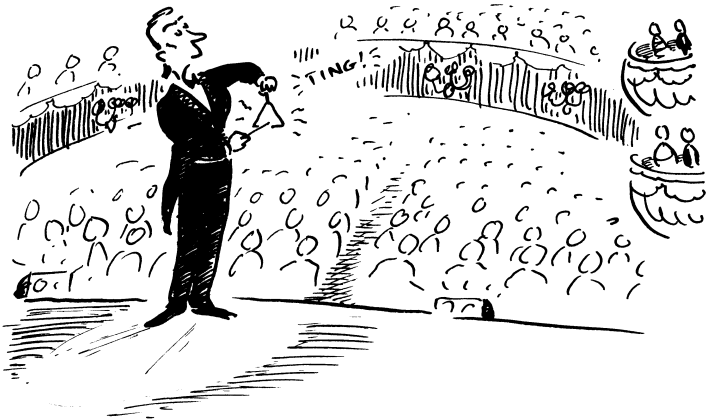


Developing awareness

The first step to successful leadership is development of self-awareness. Leaders need to take time to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own behaviour. This provides a basis for improving performance as well as increasing confidence and understanding other people. Leaders who lack personal insight are like tone-deaf musicians. Even if they acquire technical accuracy through drill and practice, they begin each performance at a distinct disadvantage. They need a sense of art as well as science in order to recognise when they have hit a sour note.

Today's programme covers four aspects for the development of self-awareness. These are:

- Leadership basics
- Self-assessment
- Following the leader
- Personal development



Leadership basics

There are three commonly accepted beliefs about leadership:

- leaders are born to their role
- certain qualities make a leader, such as ambition, charisma, confidence, initiative, independence, creativity, a sense of responsibility, among many others
- situations create leaders who adapt their behaviour to meet the needs of a specific group, time or place

All three of these ideas appear in various forms throughout history, and their serious study has dominated military and business science in this century. Although the debate about the nature of leadership continues, each approach has its firm advocates. Even so, one issue is consistently relevant regardless of personal beliefs. This is that leadership success depends upon the development of a positive relationship between leaders and supporters. The best leaders value their supporters and demonstrate this through their actions.

They know that respect is earned. It is the leaders' attitude towards their followers which inspires loyalty. This is far more important than birthright, personal qualities, a specific situation or a combination of all of these. Supporters are important because without them, leadership exists only in the imagination of the would-be leader. Without endorsement from these supporters, leaders lack power to act through them.

Leadership is the ability to present a vision so that others *want* to achieve it. It requires skills of building relationships with other people and organising resources effectively. Mastery of leadership is open to everyone.

The leader's tasks are to focus attention on a common purpose, to guide events and to organise activity. Cooperation among colleagues is inspired by encouraging a shared sense of purpose and an awareness of the importance of the task. It requires self-confidence to encourage others to complete assigned tasks, and to monitor progress while always highlighting a common vision.

A major source of this confidence is the respect which leaders have for themselves and other people. Ironically, those who already have a sense of inner worth receive respect and recognition from others naturally, while those who need to develop self worth receive little affirmation from others. They must start the process themselves.

This process of gaining self-respect can begin in everyday life when potential leaders make an effort to understand other peoples' difficulties. When colleagues' problems are sincerely acknowledged, mutual appreciation grows. This is the basis for giving and inevitably receiving respect.

There are leaders who gain power through bullying or manipulation. History and news stories from politics and business show repeatedly that this behaviour works in the short term only. Those leaders who inspire, build, create and encourage their colleagues have long-term success and

are remembered long into the future. Those who undermine, destroy, cheat and belittle others are avoided as soon as their power begins to weaken – as it always does.

Self-assessment

One source of information about leadership effectiveness is feedback from other people. It is certainly a valuable exercise to discover the impact of leadership behaviour on colleagues. Occasionally, though, other people's remarks are biased, imprecise, or lack perception. How can a person identify which comments are useful and which are not? This question is particularly challenging because it is so tempting to disregard negative comments or adopt a defensive attitude to explain them away.

One answer to this problem is for leaders to assess their own performance first. This offers a baseline against which colleagues' comments, considered carefully, may be set. A strong self-image, clear goals for personal development and high performance standards help a leader to judge if comments are helpful, appropriate, or signal the need for a change in behaviour.

Obviously, self-assessment requires the strictest honesty. It is a waste of time and opportunity to create a fantasy self-image. Also, this process needs discrimination so that an assessment of *current* leadership skills is distinguished from *future* hopes for improved performance. By recognising the difference between 'who I am now' and 'who I want to be', leaders can produce a plan of action to achieve their goals for personal development.



Following the leader

All sorts of questions come to mind when embarking on self-assessment:

- Am I fair?
- Do I take responsibility?
- Do I listen?
- Am I honest?
- Am I willing to debate?
- Do colleagues trust me?

The first challenge is to ask: 'Do I lead in such a way that I would willingly follow myself?' Improved leadership performance is based on a careful study of *actual* behaviour. It helps to think of a recent leadership experience and then focus on the details. Examining this specific performance allows an assessment of leadership skill for that occasion.

Begin the process by listing five positive and five negative examples of *actual* and *current* leadership behaviour.

Positive leadership behaviour

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Negative leadership behaviour

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

This total of 10 examples should readily come to mind. Fewer than 10 shows there is a strong need to develop better self-awareness. Alternatively, it could indicate a need for more leadership practice and experience. If either situation is the case, it is still of value to refer to the shorter list. Later, this activity should be repeated for other leadership experiences until the list includes at least 10 items.

The process of self-assessment can be continued next by considering colleagues' opinions and beliefs. Although this list depends upon guessing their reactions, it is useful to attempt it. There is always a benefit to be gained by trying to see

the world from a colleague's point of view. Again, draw up two lists, one containing proposals of colleagues' positive opinions and beliefs, and one with their negative ideas.

Colleagues' positive beliefs

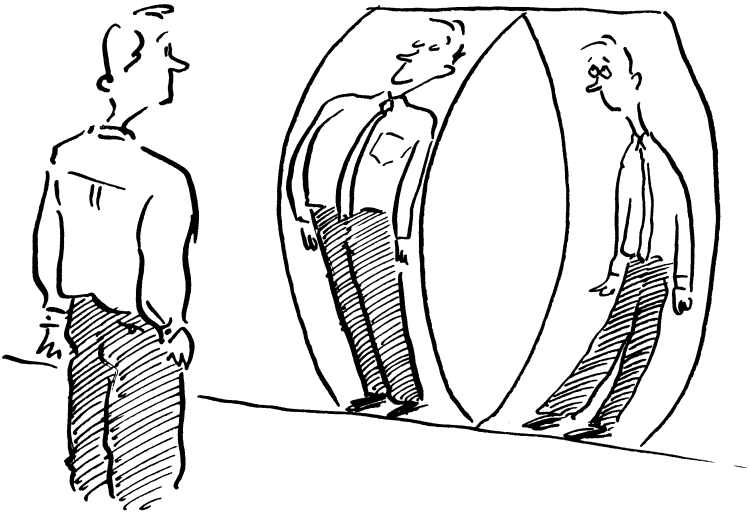
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Colleagues' negative beliefs

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Activity

- Compare the two lists: personal and colleagues' perceptions
- Are they the same throughout?
- If no, highlight the differences
- If yes, challenge yourself to try harder; then repeat the exercise
- How can you increase an awareness of your colleagues' perceptions?
- How can you increase self-awareness about your own performance?



Personal development

Assessment of both positive and negative leadership behaviour provides a basis for improving performance. Even so, any change in behaviour is best made so that it builds upon qualities which leaders actually possess and also enhances their natural personality. Everyone has a unique blend of qualities, such as courage, patience, ambition, honesty and others, and these core qualities are the real source of leadership success.

When these qualities are recognised, a leader can draw upon them with greater confidence. This also leads to discovery of which qualities leaders lack. With this information a leader can decide what needs to be developed and therefore how future performance can be improved.

For example, an inability to give clear directions is a negative leadership behaviour with a variety of potential

causes. By examining their own personal make-up, individuals can identify the source of their difficulty. Do they need better preparation, more poise, tighter thinking or improved judgement? The same problem could require a different solution depending upon each person's blend of qualities and personal make up.

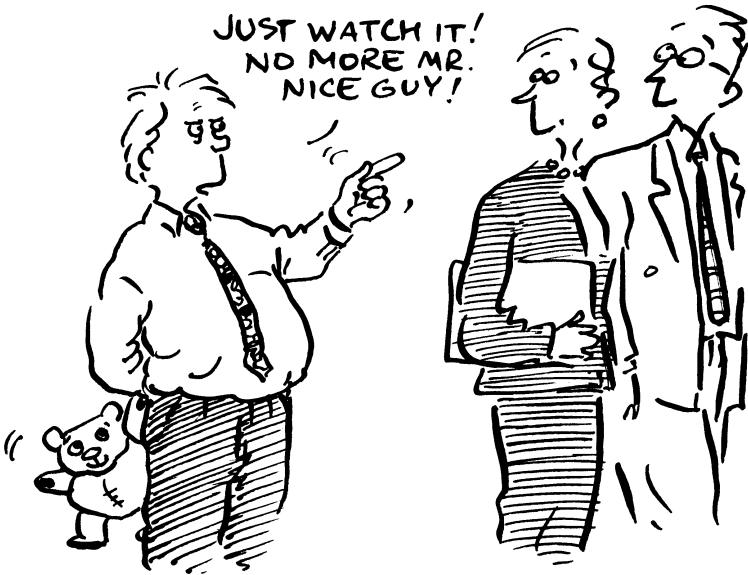
Positive behaviour

The first task is to identify this blend of individual qualities. The two lists of positive behaviour, drawn from personal and colleagues' points of view, aids this process. Each item on the lists potentially leads to identification of a personal quality.

For example, one item may read: 'Remained calm during a crisis'. This behaviour could result from a variety of qualities, such as courage, steadiness, trust, or others. When individuals recognise which quality is at the source of their calm, they can draw upon this consciously on future occasions. This insight has direct benefit for improving self-confidence. 'I am calm in a crisis because I have courage': this thought obviously enhances self-image. It also stabilises performance, because the quality is one which the individual already recognises and possesses.

Once a quality is identified for each item on the list, it is useful to write it next to that item. Some qualities may be repeated and others may offer a surprise. The point is that each feature of behaviour is drawn from a personal quality which in turn contributes to leadership performance. Frequently, this is difficult to believe or accept if any of these qualities has been criticised in the past.

For example, potential leaders who express gentleness, quiet or humility are not always understood. So rather than avoid expressing these qualities, leaders should learn how to present them so that they enhance the way they are seen as leaders. This is *always* possible, and the process begins with self-acceptance and a determination to explore how best to express each quality. Personal development means building upon existing strengths and managing weaknesses. Masking or hiding personal qualities creates good actors, not good leaders.



Negative behaviour

Negative comments provide further opportunity for growth. Through newly developed awareness, leaders can choose to change their behaviour. For example, if a leader is criticised for using humour when presenting official company business, this creates the possibility for choice. Options

include deciding: that a sense of humour is not an appropriate leadership quality; that rebellion against the criticism and increased clowning activity is best; or that learning can be gained from the comment by discovering exactly what it means. Rather than react blindly, this individual can choose to analyse and grow.

On receiving negative feedback, leaders should ask:

- Did I really do what this person says I did?
- Does this person have all the facts?
- On reflection, do I believe my behaviour was appropriate to all three essentials: time, place and audience?
- If not, when, where and with whom is it appropriate to express this quality in this way?

Improving behaviour

Leaders who manage their behaviour effectively enhance their skills when leading others. Both positive and negative feedback offer valuable information and increased understanding about how behaviour impacts supporters. The lists of both positive and negative behaviour help to identify personal qualities. Negative items offer further benefit because they draw attention to specific behaviour which needs improvement.

In general, these items can be organised into three areas for development. These are: skills, knowledge and experience. On reviewing the lists of negative features, it can be asked of each item, 'Was this behaviour the result of a lack of skill, knowledge or experience?' Three lists can thus be compiled:

- *Skills*: list items which reveal a need for new skill
- *Knowledge*: list items which reveal a need for further knowledge
- *Experience*: list items which reveal a need for more experience

Plan of action

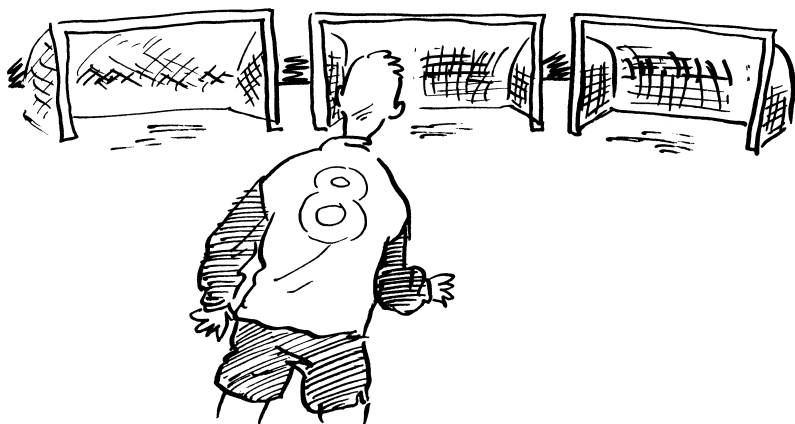
Developing skills, knowledge and experience strengthens the weak areas in leadership. Review the previous list of categorised features and decide which skills, knowledge and experience are necessary for leadership development, and then compile three lists:

- new skills
- new knowledge
- new experience

Next, consider how this development can be achieved in each of these three areas. Set one specific goal for each area:

- a goal for skills
- a goal for knowledge
- a goal for experience

Later, when these goals are achieved, the list can be reviewed again to set new goals for improving skills, knowledge and experience.



Checklist

- Think of one occasion, however great or small, during the day when you took the lead
- Describe this in one or two sentences
- What qualities did you express?
- What challenges did you experience?
- What do you like about your performance?
- What can you do to improve your performance?