

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE



In a new series, **Carol Wilson** identifies the tools and models frequently used during coaching projects. This month, she looks at the Leadership Challenge

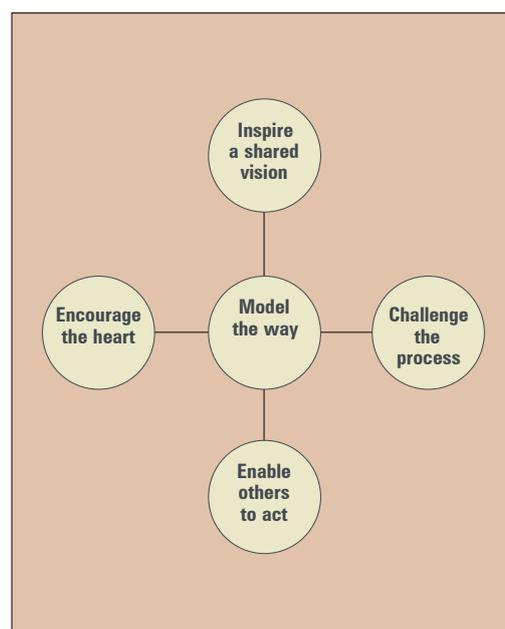
**T**he concept of the Leadership Challenge was established in the USA in 1983 by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, who started to run surveys to discover the essential qualities of a good leader.

Surveys were run with middle- and senior-level managers in private and public sector organisations, to find out first-hand what they had learned about techniques, strategies, behaviours and achieving their personal best.

A series of open questions was asked without any preconceptions of what the answers might be.

It might have been expected that the responses would mention topics like strategy, planning, organisational ability and how to direct and control staff. However, this was not by any means the case and, from the replies, Kouzes and Posner were able to categorise the top requisites for dynamic and inspiring leadership, which they named the Leadership Challenge Model.

The model comprises the following elements:



The patterns of behaviour shown in the model above can be

described more fully in the following way:

## Model the way

Effective leaders establish patterns of behaviour and become role models, demonstrating principles of how to behave towards others in the workplace, whether they are reports, peers, bosses or customers.

This is the most effective way of training future leaders for two reasons: firstly, because humans are designed to learn from copying others and, secondly, because the safest way to succeed in an organisation is assumed to be imitating the behaviour of the boss.

Many years ago I noticed that if a receptionist was rude, the CEO all the way up on the 14th floor would be too, because behaviours have a habit of seeping through organisations as if by a process of osmosis.

In addition, effective leaders look at the big goals and chunk them down into smaller steps, which are less frightening and confusing to a workforce faced with change and uncertainty.

Leaders like this simplify the way forward, unravelling bureaucracy and creating opportunities for others to experience recognition and reward for victories along the way.

## Inspire a shared vision

Inspiring leaders are passionate about their visions for the future, motivating others by their sheer enthusiasm.

If leaders are authentic and congruent in their beliefs, behaviour and actions, the people following them will trust them.

The phrase 'this has the ring of truth' says it all: whatever words may be spoken, values listed or visions described, people can sense when leaders are not walking the talk and, if that happens, nothing at all will induce workers to buy in to what they are hearing.

### Challenge the process

Effective leaders are constantly searching, evaluating and looking for ways to change or do things better, and encourage their people to do the same. However, this cannot work in a culture in which people look for scapegoats when things go wrong. Mistakes must be viewed as part of the learning process along the way to success, otherwise the organisation will stagnate because people are afraid to take action or admit their mistakes.

Some years ago I worked closely with Sir Richard Branson, who created just such a learning culture at Virgin. His attitude was as if he were standing at the start of a maze, where every mistake was celebrated as another dead end eliminated, leaving us one step nearer to the goal on the other side.

Even today, the Virgin website quotes: "We trust [people] to make the right decisions, and the odd mistake is tolerated."

### Enable others to act

Good leaders are fun to work for; they support people and challenge them to stretch themselves and discover unrealised potential. They make sure that whatever they say is designed to build people's confidence, even during times when something difficult has to be said. They treat everyone with respect.

### Encourage the heart

Successful leaders recognise the achievements of others and reward their people.

Many surveys undertaken over the years have shown that satisfaction outweighs financial rewards for the majority of workers, and the fastest way to achieving satisfaction is often simply to hear that you have made a difference, whether this comes in the form of thanks, an employee of the year award, or a simple 'well done' for the effective way you handle your day-to-day job.

Sincere recognition is a wonderful motivator; as Bob Nelson said, "you get what you reward" and the best rewards are not always the material ones.

The Kouzes and Posner model is a well-thought-through and accurate reflection of the diverse strands that make up the kind of leader people want to follow. The whole picture is needed and leadership will not be truly effective if any of the categories described in this article is wanting.

This type of leadership is recognised far more widely now than when Kouzes and Posner started their surveys in 1983, or when Sir Richard Branson started putting all the principles into practice during the previous decade; it is what we mean when we talk about a 'coaching style of management' and the result for the organisation will be 'a coaching culture', if the leaders get it right.

### Role models are vital

However, one of the big challenges I see today is that organisations recognise what they want from their leaders, whether they call it the Kouzes & Posner, or similar, model or indeed coaching, and they spend a great deal of time and money sending their managers to seminars that exhort them to behave according to the principles.

But Richard Branson behaved in this way because he absorbed the skills from early role models, particularly his mother. Managers who have not experienced this style of leadership, whether from parents, teachers or other managers, will have a big gap to leap across in order to start delivering it themselves.

The good news is that, just as Branson learned the behaviour early on in life, people can learn new habits at any age. What is essential is that management training, which gives a picture of how to lead, is accompanied by clear and specific techniques.

Managers need to see the behaviour modelled, and experience through practise sessions simple exercises in how to listen, how to ask before telling, and how to use the GROW model or a similar framework for conversations, planning and meetings.

I have coached directors one-to-one, spending much of our time exploring these basic techniques to help them deal with their issues when learning on a course with other participants would actually be much more effective.

These are the skills taught on coaching courses, which is why training managers in coaching skills is becoming so popular in organisations. ■

#### REFERENCES

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