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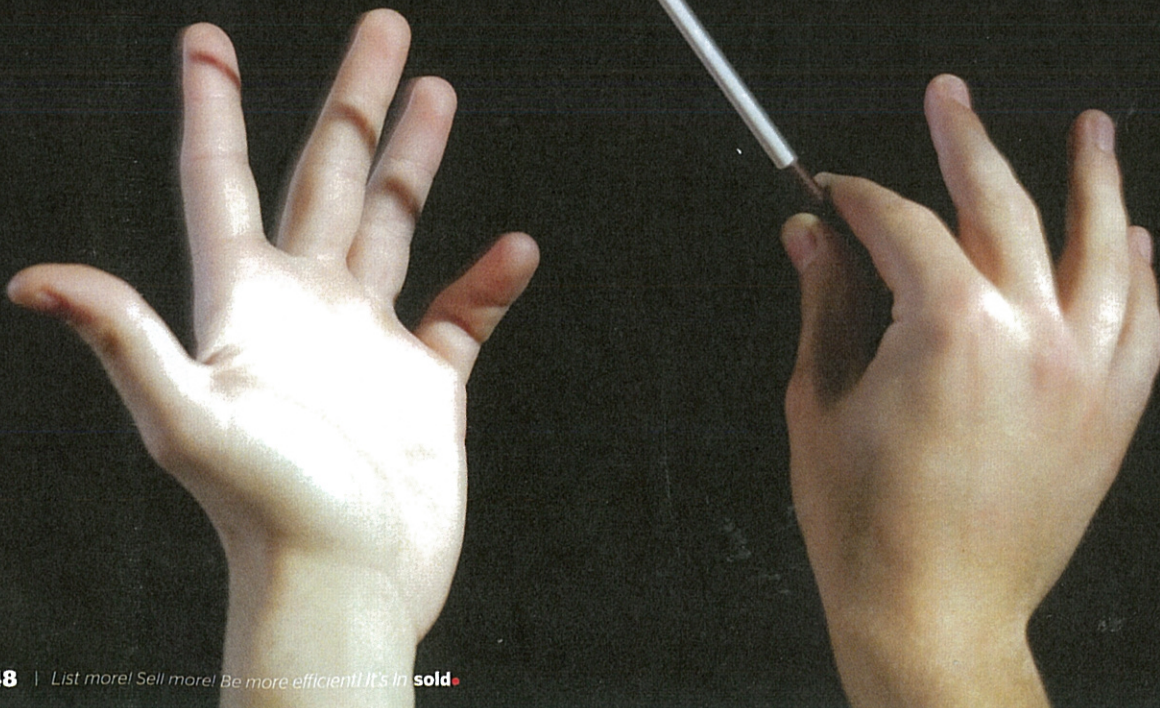


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# Are Leaders Born or Made?



## Bradley Brown, CEO of Fletchers, tells his story about how he became a management leader.

**I** am using the term management leader to refer to the path I've chosen, which is to be a leader in the business environment.

We continually read theories from a range of writers on what makes a good leader, what leaders do, or how you too can be a leader in six easy steps. We rarely read articles from leaders in action, telling us in practical terms how they lead and the methods they employ to succeed in what the theorists tell us is so difficult.

E. M. Estes said, "Leadership is the courage to admit mistakes, the vision to welcome change, the enthusiasm to motivate others and the confidence to stay out of step when everyone else is marching to the wrong tune."

The American school system, of which I am a product, works from day one to build the skills society values. I believe the Australian school system now works in a similar fashion. What makes the American system relevant in this case is that American society values leadership qualities above almost all else.

Throughout my formative years I was continually in a leadership position, as president of most of my classes and captain of many sporting teams. Family members and friends would ask me why I was being singled out for leadership positions; my response was "I don't know". I actually had some idea, but perhaps an innate though unfounded belief in the need to protect my intellectual property kept me from telling them.

During high school the capitalist in me came out and I went to work. Six months later I was promoted over 22 others when the chain I worked for decided to appoint someone in each store to set the roster, allocate jobs and train new staff. I was appointed despite being part-time, one of the last hired and the youngest.

While at university I was president of California's largest university club. This position confirmed my desire to lead commercial organisations. What was I doing that kept taking me to the top in these diverse environments?

Is there a common pattern to the approach I took to these different opportunities? The answer is yes, but modified for each situation. My secret weapon has always been the faith I show in the people around me. I base this faith on a realistic assessment of the contribution each person can make to the team; I then

support the person with a healthy dose of moral and instructional support.

"For lack of training, they lacked knowledge. For lack of knowledge, they lacked confidence. For lack of confidence, they lacked victory." Julius Caesar.

I believe people generally achieve closer to their potential as a member of my team than perhaps they have previously experienced. When people are able to work together to achieve more, they not only feel a great sense of accomplishment, but also often continue to motivate themselves to keep achieving more and more. People also love to achieve together and they truly believe in the leader who has helped them to rise to levels they thought were beyond them.

In 1984, at the age of 25, I migrated to Australia, having spent a fair amount of time with Australians overseas. How ironic was it for a loud and talkative Yank, who aspired to boldly lead organisations from the front, to come to the land with the 'tall poppy syndrome'! Well, I never was one to shy away from a challenge.

In 1994, after 10 years in several different management positions within two organisations, a long sought-after goal was realised when I became Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for a top-10 Melbourne commercial law firm. In a unique position within the legal industry, which was not exactly known for allowing non-lawyers to run their firms (particularly with no executive partner to whom to report), I had the opportunity to put my years of learning into practice as a leader of a commercial organisation. I was very excited, to say the least! I am pleased to say I lived up to the challenge, turning around this embattled firm and eventually leading it to become part of a national company.

In 2002 I was privileged to become the first CEO for Fletchers Real Estate, at the time an 83-year-old firm with three offices, which had a proud history but a tired presence. Over the last 10 years I have been able to put my leadership skills to the test, leading this company towards the brave new future in store for our industry.

Fletchers' 12-office network is the reigning REIV Agency of the Year and Website winner (for the third time). Our company began franchising in 2010 and has been a real thought leader in technology, branding and agent development over the last decade.

The following are my views and methods regarding leadership:

### CHANGE MANAGEMENT

We have read so much about how people fear change. That is bunk, as far as I'm concerned. People don't fear change so much, but rather the unknown. I take the time to work with my people to understand what is involved with the change process: the reasons why change is necessary, the physiological effects of change on people, how we will be implementing the change process, what will be expected from them and how they can play a useful part in the process.

People appreciate and respond to being treated with respect and care in relation to how they are going to deal with changes that will no doubt lead to them doing very different things in their jobs. If people feel part of the process with a role to play in creating the new paradigm, they respond amazingly well, particularly when the change process is supported with an aligned approach.

The leader who can inspire an organisation to embrace and love the change process is a leader who works with an organisation, which will survive.

### ALIGNMENT

One of the real keys to leadership is ensuring that the programs and policies implemented support the direction in which the change process is taking the organisation and have been developed with input from the end users.

Thomas A. Edison said, "I start where the last man left off."

Most people are sceptical about the latest change, as they have seen so many that management has inflicted upon them

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before moving on to the next one - or worse, they leave as new management arrive with yet another new approach.

Each element of change must be in support of the last and preparing the way for the next. The people must believe in it: that the changes will be implemented and are part of a well-conceived grand plan.

### THE PLAN

Nobody knows the job as well as the person performing it and no one knows the organisation like its people. They need to be involved in developing the plan, which everyone will ultimately need to own if it is to succeed.

Leaders must lead, but not in a

vacuum. Seeking input into the direction the organisation will take from the stakeholders will help to ensure the plan is well conceived. It's often not possible to know how the plan should unfold early in the process, and as a new leader you are in desperate need to lead from the front and to gain the confidence of your people.

The way to progress is to ensure the path you are going down has sufficient flexibility, but is focused enough to be moving the organisation forward. People respect a leader who is honest about where the organisation is headed, even if the leader is not yet completely sure.



For one organisation I led which required a lot of change, I took all members of my firm through seminars on where our firm was headed, using a solid arrow, which had an upwards bent, as a symbol of the approach we were going to take in moving the firm forward. The solid aspect referred to the fact that we all had to move together; there was no room for those who didn't wish to join in and move forward. The upward bend showed the direction we were going in, while recognising the fact we didn't yet know the exact path. The length of the arrow was in realisation of the fact that some would perhaps get where we were going faster than others, but all those within the organisation would get there.

We began the process by educating the entire firm on what was involved in the strategic planning process and the role they would be playing. We broke the organisation into natural manageable units; that is sales, property management and internal services for the planning

process. Each of our teams developed plans which were then brought together into an overall firm strategy designed to enable the team plans to succeed. Quarterly reporting as to the progress of the plans, six monthly reviews and yearly updates are all part of the process.

**COMMUNICATION**

Effective communication is the most important tool for a good leader, and often the most overlooked, misused and maligned of all management tools. People naturally want to know what is going on and why. "Knowledge is power," said the

**Nobody knows the job as well as the person performing it, and no one knows the organisation like its people**

English philosopher Francis Bacon, so why, I ask, not make a powerful work force by sharing the 'knowledge'? The effective leader knows that the way to people's hearts is through their ears and eyes.

I attempt to have an understanding of the information requirements of my people, then to give them what they need in a form they can understand and utilise. Often people need to be educated about what is available before they can tell you what they need. They may also require training on how to incorporate this new resource into their job.

On a weekly basis I communicate all that I can on what is happening at our firm and why. I believe people are more interested and hence involved when they can see the big picture and are also kept abreast of the detail.

**CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT**

Leaders must create an environment of ongoing improvement. Therefore, they themselves must be continuously improving. Through formal and informal means, leaders must keep up with what is happening worldwide in the areas, which touch their business.

We should seek to inspire people to embrace learning and the development of their ability to be more successful and do their job better on a daily basis. Everyone in the organisation should understand and have the means to spend a percentage of their day getting better at what they do, and in fact delivering improved results.

**ROLE MODEL**

Nothing more needs to be said on the subject than 'Do as I do, not as I say', because in fact that is the best you can hope for.

**THE HUMAN FACTOR**

I believe in people and their ability to develop, perhaps to a greater extent than they see themselves. People need to see what's out in front of them if they are to get there. Dr Stephen Covey's concept of developing people through the accomplishment of tasks is spot on and a key in the human factor equation. A genuine commitment to helping your people achieve will create an unbeatable work force, which will be 'turned on' and achieve more than was thought possible from the individuals concerned.

Our agenda is very clear with people;

that is, to help them achieve their aspirations, even if this first means helping them discover what they are. Working from the premise that it is the responsibility of all employees to do their best for themselves and the firm, provide them with direct positive feedback whenever warranted and constructive feedback on a just-in-time basis. Feedback should be as objective as possible: outlining the issue, asking them their view, filling in the blanks as required, before moving into the mode of business as usual. I expect everyone within the organisation to work to improve themselves, their unit and the firm. Assisting people to achieve more for themselves and the firm is my number one priority and definitely the highest value activity I can perform in a leadership role.

Many organisations talk about caring for their people. They create all sorts of programs and overheads to prove it, when in reality they don't put their mouth where their money is. By helping those around you actually to grow, thereby making a greater contribution to the organisation and improving their position or marketability along the way, you can truly inspire 'the human factor'.



As a Director and CEO of Fletchers, **Bradley Brown** has overseen the complete transformation of this real estate firm into one of the

leading agencies in Australasia. He is responsible for ensuring that the firm achieves outstanding outcomes for its clients, and that its people maintain their reputation for being the best in the real estate industry. For more information visit [fletchers.net.au](http://fletchers.net.au).