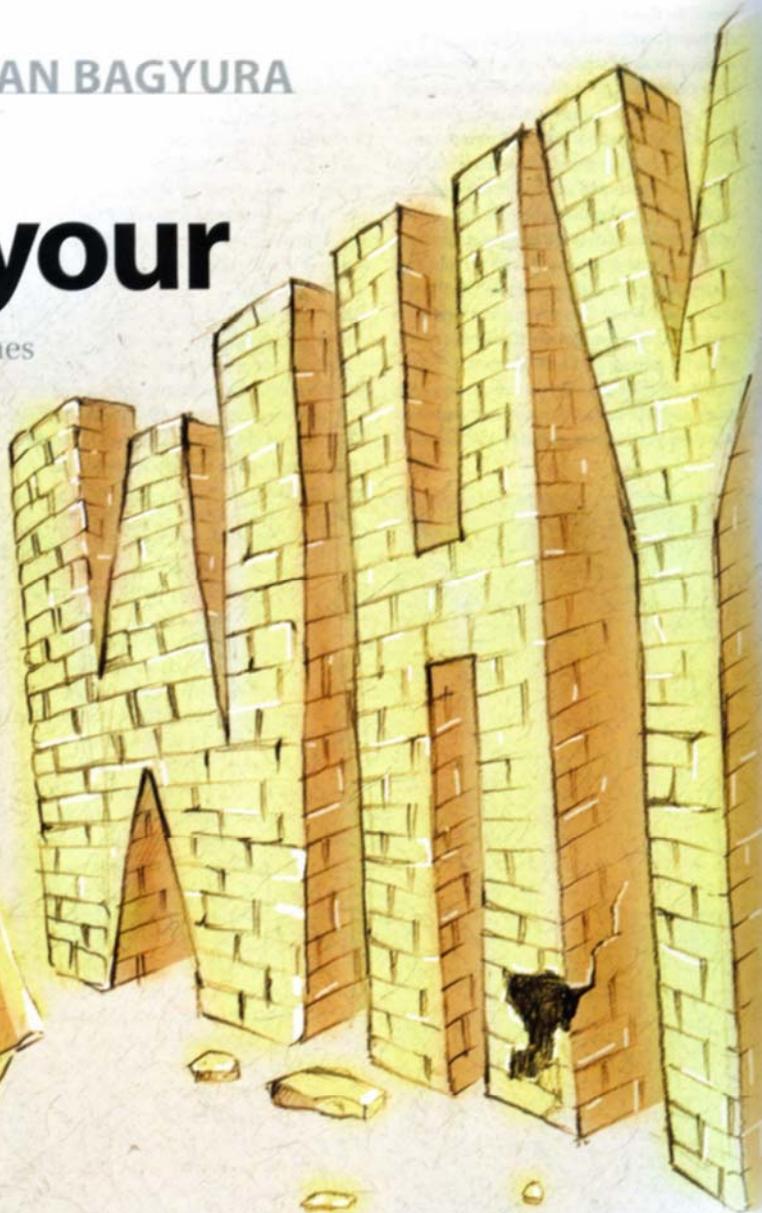




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Know your

The best leaders are the ones who are focused on bringing out the best in their people by transforming lives



As a leadership coach, I am a firm believer that a person has to be able to lead himself before he can successfully lead another individual, a team or an organisation.

Where is the best place to start?

The first thing a great leader should do is to determine what his purpose is. This is his 'why'. I don't mean the fancy purpose or mission statements that you see hanging on walls that no one understands or pays any attention to. I mean the purpose, the guiding reason that the leader has for the business.

Why is he there? It has to be something beyond profits. I believe the best leaders are the ones who are focused on bringing out the best in their people – transforming lives. When someone has that as his purpose, the profits just naturally follow. From that standpoint, he can determine his vision for business, based on the guiding purpose.

So it is assumed that once the leader knows his purpose, he will be open, truthful and transparent in communicating that purpose and vision. It is actually quite surprising, but many times in companies that have more than a couple of hundred employees, the people don't even know the name of the CEO.

They feel no connection to the leader and certainly no connection to the purpose and vision for the business. This also translates to how valued they feel. When a person does not feel valued for his contribution, he will not be committed to its success.

This has a very serious impact on the business. A company's greatest assets are its employees and its customers. Some may put it the other way around, but they are both very important in my eyes.

Let's take a closer look. If the employees are not happy and don't feel valued, anyone that they come into contact with will know it. If a customer hears an employee speaking badly about his employer, it has a negative impact.

I have personally seen it where disgruntled employees are perfectly happy to tell any customer just how bad they think things are within the business. This certainly does not inspire confidence in the customer.

Customers like to hear happy employees. There is a subconscious thing that happens then. If employees are happy, then it must follow that the company treats them well. If a company treats its employees well, then it certainly is going to treat its lifeline, or in other words its customers, well.

I think that the leadership of the company should know the 'why' of its employees and the 'why' of its customers. Now I recognise that as a company grows in size there will be people other than the leader who will be responsible for this, but the principle remains the same.

When we know the why for our employees and customers, this will also inspire people to be and do more.

When it comes to knowing the customer's 'why', this is what makes a tremendous difference in the relationship between a vendor and a customer. When a company knows the why of its customers, then it is focused on helping them achieve their goals and markets products and services that will move them in the direction of their goals.

The development of products will be based on the needs of the clients. When companies are operating in this mode, they are no longer competing for business. They are very much operating on the creative plane.

So it all really comes down to this one fact: the company is a reflection of its leadership. It is easy to figure out what is happening at the top based on what you see happening on other levels of an organisation.

Sometimes people will want to point the finger and say the problem is here or there, meaning in different departments, but actually everything filters down from the top. So if we want to see different results in any and every area of the business, it must start with the leader first.

Additionally, I think that a leader needs to maintain this balance. One thing that I suggest my clients do is spend at least half an hour each day just writing about ways in which they can improve their service. Now they may not implement everything – probably only 10-20 per cent of what they come up with – but this exercise gets them thinking from another standpoint.

The people who receive the most are the ones who give the most. This is not only true for individuals, but also for businesses. If the focus is on how we can give the absolute best service, then the profits will follow. If a company is only focused on profits, it is missing the big picture and will always be scurrying for business instead of having clients chasing it.

Ways to Improve Your Success as a Leader

Have you ever wondered what you could do immediately to start improving your leadership skills? Here are six recommendations that will make a big difference as you start to implement them. It only takes 21 days to form a habit. Take one, form a habit and then move on to the next one.

Know your purpose, vision and goals for the organisation: Clearly communicate them to everyone within the organisation. Don't assume that every employee knows what he is. Once you are clear on your purpose, clearly understand what your employees' purpose, vision and goals are.

When there is a need for buy-in on the part of the members of your organisation, then changes meet far less resistance than those that are handed down through a memo without any regard as to the long-term effects of how employees will respond or not respond.

Sharing your vision and your reason for doing things will involve others and they will feel like they are a part of the solution. By creating this type of environment, they will start using their creativity to respond to your requirements. Prepare to be surprised by the results.

When everyone is pulling in the same direction, the flow is easier which results in better productivity, better attendance and better profits. You can easily test this by assigning a task to two people. Give one an order to do something and then with the other person, involve them by sharing why you want this done. Compare the outcomes.

Look for how you can serve others: Yesterday's leaders sat in their big offices, barking orders and expecting people to serve them. Today it is about how the leader can serve the organisation, its employees and customers. By asking yourself each morning "what can I do today to better serve my organisation?" you will ignite your imagination in a powerful and positive way.

Ask powerful questions: Like the question above, powerful questions are the ones that are creative and empowering.

Too often, people shut down their imagination and other mental faculties by saying things such as "I can't" or "It's not possible". Our possibilities are endless, but we need to learn how to ask questions that will tap into our creative power. I like the response an associate of mine has whenever confronted with a challenging situation. He immediately says, "That's great!" and then looks for what is great about it. As Emerson said, "What we focus on must grow."

Be approachable and communicate with everyone: Successful leaders of today are not isolated and insulated; instead they are at the grassroots level, sharing their vision, understanding the people's 'whys' and providing a path for everyone to win.

Leaders need to know the 'why' for each employee, the 'why' for their customers, and the 'why' for their direction. It is people's 'why' that will motivate them. Don't assume that your employees and customers care about your 'why' if you haven't bothered to know theirs.

But if you help them to achieve what is important to them, they will help you along the way.

You must be open to hear from others. Walk amongst your employees, speak with them on a personal level, listen to what they have to say and focus on them. This is about having constructive conversations without grumbling or complaining. Implement a programme where people can submit questions to the leader that are answered on a regular basis.

Learn to take decisions: Napoleon Hill in his classic Think & Grow Rich stated that one of the major causes of failure is lack of decision and I am inclined to agree with him. In

his analysis of the wealthiest and most successful leaders of the time, he found that every one of them had the habit of reaching decisions quickly and of changing these decisions slowly, if and when they were changed.

I believe acquiring this habit is of paramount importance to top leaders. No one wants to follow someone who cannot make a decision and you will soon find that there is an informal leader in your organisation who others look to for direction.

Many times people will use the excuse that they require more information before they can make a decision, but as Malcolm Gladwell proved in his book *Blink – The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, when he said we think better and make better decisions when we have less information rather than more.

He coined the term ‘thin-slicing’. He wrote, “And the truth is that our unconscious is really good at this, to the point where thin-slicing often delivers a better answer than more deliberate and exhaustive ways of thinking.” Learn to make decisions and learn to trust your judgment.

There is only one question to ask when confronted with a decision. Don’t ask yourself if doing something is right or wrong. Ask yourself “If I do this, will it move me in the direction of my goal?” If the answer is yes, then do it. If it won’t, then leave it.

Take responsibility for everything that is happening in your business: I find that people who refuse to accept responsibility for the life they have created also don’t make decisions. The two habits of refusing responsibilities and the fear of making a decision go hand in hand and must be overcome in order to be an effective leader.

Resolve today to stop blaming or making excuses and instead accept responsibility. Then look for your next step to improve the situation. No one can improve anything if they are focused on blame or excuses. The creative faculty will shut down or be used negatively which is really going in the wrong direction unless it is focused properly. So by simply acknowledging responsibility and then asking questions such as “Now what is the best next step to take?” you can improve the situation.