

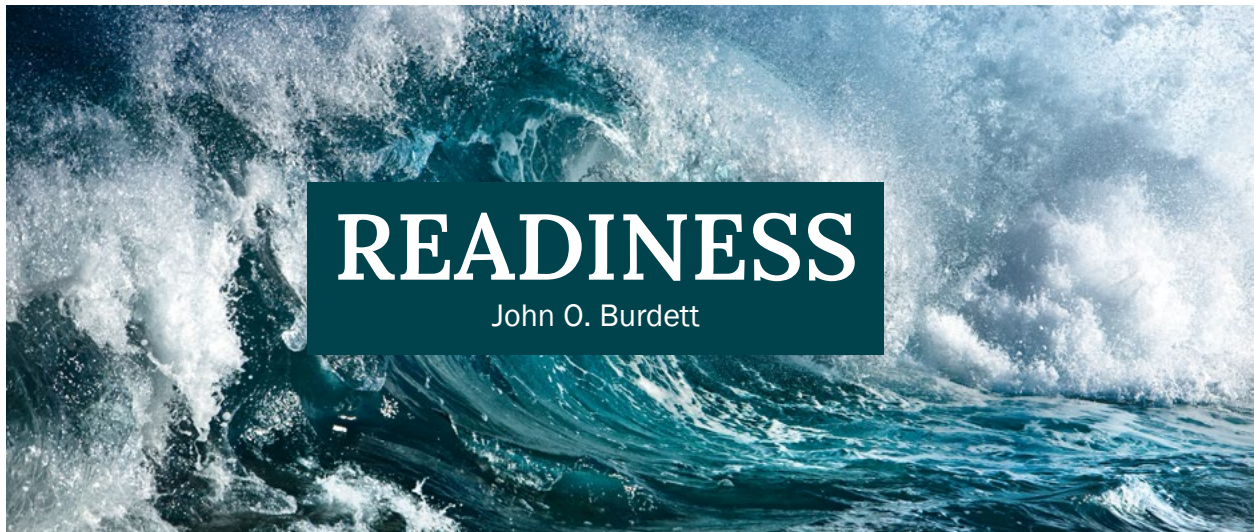
READINESS

TRANSEARCH
EXECUTIVE SEARCH & LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

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“A plan is the future seen through a cloudy glass. The right question, at the right time, brings a sense of meaning to tomorrow’s possibility.”

As a generalisation, people look for one of three things in a job: to make money, to make a career or to make a difference. The first is self-centred and, likely, short-term.¹ The second implies delegating one’s career to the organization. The third means taking personal responsibility for who we become. As the pace of change accelerates, as the degree of uncertainty increases, leaders will have to blaze a new path for others to follow. And where increasing ambiguity and being comfortable with



¹ American psychologist Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000) referred to people who were purely interested in compensation as “jumping for the jelly beans.”



being uncomfortable define success, letting someone else write the script of your story is to assume hope is a strategy.

This raises an important question: “How should a leader prepare for a future where what got us here won’t get us to where we need to be?” Part of the answer is to work for a market leader where outstanding coaching and mentoring are the norm. In that the return on the investment for leadership development is fivefold, it can also be assumed that market leaders make knowledge management, leading-edge training and planned succession part of their culture.

Here, let me inject a personal insight. Over the years I have worked with a number of major organizations on succession. An aspect of that work often meant running leadership development workshops. A component of those workshops was conducting a series of executive interviews (often in front of a large audience), with each interview involving a top executive. The theme? What was their carer journey? How did the executive in question get to where they are?

In these interviews three key insights emerged. One, leadership success meant taking responsibility for one’s own career. Two, almost without exception, each of the leaders interviewed had a well-honed career plan. Three, they invariably moved away from that





plan. The question, of course, is why? Simply put, opportunity raised its inviting head. A key executive within the business moved on unexpectedly. A business acquisition, for it to be successful, meant utilising talent from within the acquiring organization. An unexpected call from an executive search firm opened up a new and unexpected career opportunity.

If one digs deeper there was something else at play. Clearly, half of the equation was unexpected opportunity. The other half was being able to take advantage of that opportunity. Here, the executives who thrived all had one thing in common, they were able to step into the unknown because, in their own way, they were ready!

Readiness isn't a matter of luck. It's a mindset. It's being prepared for the unforeseen. It's an intuitive sense of always striving to be the best we can be. It's buying into the reality that tomorrow won't be a replay of today. It's the recognition that, when facing unknown terrain, all we can really draw on is leadership character x the speed and agility of how we learn. And by implication, how quickly we unlearn.²

Although it *currently* contains not a shred of intelligence, AI may well prove to be more disruptive than the typewriter, the microchip and the iPhone combined. As each of us face an uncertain future, it's essential to equip ourselves for the future we *can know*³: attend conferences, invest in training and continue to move critical competencies to the next level. No less important, however, is to be ready to face what we don't know. What follows is an outline of the key actions that allow today's leader to build **READINESS**.

Read. The first four letters of **Readiness**! Leaders are readers.⁴ Always! Sadly, when you ask someone in a leadership role what they are currently reading, the common retort is that "I don't have time to read." Well, if you have pretensions to be a successful leader in the future and you don't hunger for new ideas and insights from those already blazing a new path – you will suddenly find yourself with unlimited time to read. Fortunately, an enquiring mind isn't a burden, it's a joy.

² Beginnings start with endings.

³ At the speed at which the environment is unfolding somewhat limited in scope and probably wrong.

⁴ No one will lose their job to AI. They may well, however, lose their job to someone well versed in the use of AI. With that in mind, any leader who isn't reading everything they can about AI, who isn't developing skills in the unfolding AI applications is a party to their own downfall.



The good news is that AI can provide an individual learning agenda, optimise what you need to read and even act as a digital coach. The not so good news is that if we lean too heavily on AI, if we start to automate self-development, if we use ChatGPT and the like for creative writing tasks, the result won't be healthy. We'll experience a sharp decline in both cognitive capability and creativity.

Over the years I have coached a good many C-suite executives. Before meeting with each for the first time, I initiate, what has turned out to be, an acid test of future coaching success. I ask the potential executive coachee to read a paper that I have authored on different approaches to coaching. The idea is to adapt the coaching approach to complement the leadership point of view of the coachee. It's a mistake to assume one-size-fits-all!





As for it being an acid test? If they read my coaching paper, I know that the executive will, in all likelihood, get a great deal from a coaching relationship. Conversely, if they are “too busy” to read the material, the probability of success (at least in the short-term) declines dramatically.

*“Those who don’t read are no better
than those that can’t read.”*

– Mark Twain

Engage the heart and enrich the spirit. Although they are rarely framed that way, traditional leadership challenges fall under, what can be defined as, “head and hand problems.” Consider the following:

The head (to include): interpreting the needs of different stakeholders, alignment between management and the board, building an appropriate relationship with the capital markets, business strategy, succession, the philosophy regarding organization culture, a winning value proposition, capital investment generally, introducing competitive technology.

The hand (to include): measuring organization culture, manpower planning, business development, R&D, organization design, financial rigour, operational excellence, talent acquisition, customer satisfaction, safety, productivity, the speed of getting things done, supply chain management, inventory control, quality, industrial relations, putting technology to work.

So far so good but there is a new game in town. A business environment where control, efficiency and cutting cost give way to agility, ongoing innovation and success based on value creation. We are describing a business model where unwarranted hierarchy and self-contained silos are swept aside by an organization model that is Flat, Fast, Focused, Flexible and Fertile to new ideas. A business culture where collaborative networks are enabled by an AI hub (communication, connection,



collaboration and real-time information on the wider business context). Above all else, an organization that is a *team of teams*.

As organizations strip out administrative positions (as they will),⁵ as they become flatter and faster (as they must), decision-making, capability, know-how and the source of new ideas, of necessity, move from the *hierarchical enabled few* to the *flat job enriched many*. In doing so, employing the head and empowering the hand must, sooner rather than later, be found wanting ... unless balanced by a leader's ability to engage the heart and enrich the spirit.

The heart (to include): organization purpose, building a sense of belonging, culture change, succession, challenging those who don't live the organization's values, being



⁵ 1924 Nobel prizewinner Geoffrey Hinton, called the “Godfather of AI” (University of Toronto), suggested that AI will replace pretty well everyone in a white-collar job. Big tech companies have significantly reduced hiring new graduates for entry-level roles. AI is a significant reason for the decline. A report released in January 2025 from Bloomberg Intelligence showed that AI could cause as many as 200,000 job cuts across 93 major banks, including Citigroup and JPMorgan, within the next five years.



a role model, engagement, feedback, attracting talent, sharing best practice, coaching, mentoring, leading the team, bringing new people onto the team, psychological safety, asking great questions, cross-team collaboration, retention, orchestrating learning, motivating and delegating in virtual space.

The spirit (to include): caring, vulnerability, authenticity, listening, being in the moment, creating supportive day-to-day dialogue, managing the “noise” emanating from the informal organization, encouraging creativity, building bridges to the wider community, reinforcing diversity, enforcing equity, ensuring that inclusion is a priority, being a champion of the environment.

Readiness is to work on leadership balance every day in every way. Think of it in these terms. No matter how well thought through your strategy, if middle management are disillusioned, it won't be enacted! It matters not what technology you are about to employ; if those at the helm exhibit a lack of caring, expect less than optimum implementation. And keep in mind what a leader says is largely inconsequential when compared to what it is that they are perceived to do. Trust – a cultural imperative that draws heavily on the heart and spirit – is a precious commodity that takes time to build but can be shattered in an instance.

*“Today, the ‘hard stuff’ describes work
that used to be referred to as the ‘soft stuff.’”*

– Anonymous



Ask great questions. What is a great question? A great question breaks the listener's natural rapport and flow. Like an electric shock, it's a jolt of reality. It penetrates the veil of knowing the answer. It moves the conversation closer to the truth. It interrupts the conversation the listener would otherwise be having with themselves.

A great question makes the silence louder.⁶ How loud? Consider the question that was put to applicants seeking to join the newly formed Royal Marine Commandos in WWI. "What makes a young lad like you tired of living?"⁷ "He who asks a question remains a fool for five minutes. He who does not ask remains a fool forever." – Chinese Proverb

The word "question" is derived from the Latin *quaerere* (to seek). There is no single *right* question. There is, however, a way to move the conversation forward such that the right outcome is achieved. Running a meeting, coaching, mentoring, the performance discussion, facilitating dialogue around strategy ... all rise or fall on the quality of the questions asked. Yesterday, the power broker in the room used knowledge and



⁶ Based loosely on a Zen proverb.

⁷ David O'Keefe, *One Day in August* (2014) at page 206.



information to hammer out an outcome the way a blacksmith shapes iron. Today, the person who shapes the future does so through the quality of their questions.

To find a better question we have to first shed the mask many of us hide behind. Authenticity is truth. A great question springs from the depths of who we are. It surfaces when the real you is fully present. Princeton University psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov show in their research that when meeting someone new, we rate qualities like trustworthiness, likability and aggressiveness within the first tenth of a second. It's an in-the-moment opinion that, at least initially, doesn't change with additional exposure. Writing in *Wired* magazine, social psychologist Amy Cuddy suggested that the first impression draws on two pivotal questions: "What are this person's intentions toward me?" and "How strong and competent is this person?"⁸

"It's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble, it's what you think you know that ain't so." – Mark Twain. To wit, nowhere is the ability to ask a great question more important than in developing readiness. Fortunately, great questions need not be the realm of the gifted few. We can all summon up great questions. As a species, along with standing tall and the use of fire, it's one of the things that got us here!

*"A plan is the future seen through a cloudy glass.
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sense of meaning to tomorrow's possibility."*

– John O. Burdett



Develop your coaching competency. Coaching should not be confused with mentoring, counselling and/or training. Mentoring is a seasoned performer, not by age, who shares their story, with a less seasoned performer. The outcome? To accelerate the mentee through the learning curve. Counselling is introduced when the employee exhibits a problem and where its origins lie outside of the workplace, e.g., alcoholism, chronic tardiness, anger management. A common mistake is to try to coach someone where counselling is needed. Training refers to new skills.

Coaching focuses on moving the coachee to the next level of performance (results and/or behaviour) *within* the current role.⁹ There is an important rider here. The team leader who can't coach, can't lead! And, those who know how to coach but who don't, are no better off than those who can't coach. More pragmatically, in the emerging team-driven business climate, those who don't or can't coach won't be allowed to lead.



⁹ Coaching also supports the succession process. There, the coaching approach focuses on the leadership competencies demanded in a future role.



Here we should add, if the employee in question isn't open to being coached, they belong in a different organization. Don't ignore them, work around them or hope for a miracle. The opportunity cost is too great.

In a team-based culture there is great value in team members coaching each other. Although demanding a heightened level of sensitivity, there is also potential benefit from coaching the leader who is one-level-up. The challenge? Don't let them know you are coaching them.

To coach is to reveal the coachee to themselves. This theme of self-development is enriched where coaching draws on seven underlying disciplines:

- 1. Cheering works!** Affirmation and catching people doing it right creates an emotional platform for coaching to have real traction.
- 2. What the coach believes is what the coachee perceives.** No matter how well they think that they mask it, if the coach doesn't believe the coachee is capable and ready to move to the next level of performance, the coach becomes part of the problem. What if you don't believe? As a coach, you have to believe.
- 3. Develop a beginner's mind.** Have an attitude of openness. Learn to see with new eyes. Let go of thinking you know the best way forward. Listen to every suggestion and/or idea as if it is the first time you have heard it. If you are open to being surprised – don't be surprised if you are surprised. The concept of a beginner's mind is a core principle in Zen Buddhism. The Japanese term is *Shoshin*.
- 4. Don't confuse coaching with problem-solving.** In the manager-employee relationship there are four nexus of power:
 - Tell and listen – *power over*. “This is what I need you to do.”
 - Tell and sell – *soft power over*. “This is what I would like you to do, because ...” Explaining “why” makes it far more likely that the request will be enacted.
 - Problem-solving – *power with*. “Let's get together and between us figure out the best way forward.”
 - Coaching – *power to*. The way forward lies with the coachee. You know you have moved off the coaching track when you ask, “Have you thought of ... ?” “My suggestion would be ...” “Here is what worked for me when I faced that issue.”



5. **All meaningful learning starts with a great question.** As the late Peter Drucker pointed out, “Fifty years ago a leader knew the answer ... today they ask great questions.” The right question interrupts established patterns, surfaces outdated stories and/or introduces a new narrative.
6. **To coach is to listen in the way you always wanted to be listened to.**
7. **Coaching without follow-up is a false promise.** If it’s not written down, it won’t happen. The specific what, when, the behavioural outcomes and any resources/ training agreed to during the coaching conversation should be captured as soon after the conversation as possible. Who should capture and communicate (with the coach) what was agreed? The coachee!

The late Maya Angelou reminded us, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” No less important, people develop fastest when they are playing to their strengths.

*“The better we become at coaching others,
the more we know ourselves.”*

– John O. Burdett

Invest time and effort into activities that “stir” the curiosity. The dictionary describes curiosity as “the state of being curious: inquisitive, wondering, ready to poke around and figure something out.” Curiosity isn’t merely a way to think; it has an outcome.

There are two forms of curiosity: passive and active. Passive curiosity is coming across something new and having a conversation along the lines “I would like to know more about that.” Active curiosity is a conversation where the theme is “I must (and will) get to know all about that.” Readiness feeds on active curiosity.

You can’t truly understand curiosity without reference to its alter ego “learning.” There are three dominant ways to learn:



1. Simple learning (instruction).
2. Learning how to learn (exploration).
3. Learning how to learn limited only by the imagination of the learner (play).

Imagine. You have just bought a piece of flatpack furniture from Ikea. *Simple learning* is to follow the instructions in the box. *Learning how to learn* is to assemble your purchase without reference to the instructions. Learning how to learn limited only by imagination is to take the pieces of wood and create something that was not intended by the manufacturer.

As we move beyond simple learning we are tapping into different degrees of curiosity, building heightened propensity for agility and describing very different speeds of learning.

We stimulate curiosity by asking new questions,¹⁰ reviewing best practices, training the team in storytelling and using language that stimulates imagery, e.g., “imagine.”



¹⁰ What's the worst thing the competition could do and how can we do it first?



When the team is exploring new ways forward, we give life to curiosity when the team leaders speak last.

Curiosity surfaces when we find ways to change the established patterns of play. Curiosity is enacted when, in meetings, we ask team members to forego their usual seat. Curiosity is stimulated when we have the team visit the showroom of the market leader from a very different market sector. Curiosity is stirred when we invite one of the organization's top performers to meet with the team and explain how they approach their work.

In fanning the flames of curiosity consider a paradox as a gift from the gods. When the team was stuck, Niels Bohr – the famous Danish physicist who won the Nobel Prize in 1922 for his work on the structure of the atom – was fond of saying “a paradox, now we can move forward.”

A paradox arises when we come across ideas that, on the surface, appear to be contradictory, e.g., an organization has to be both one culture and, at the same time, different cultures. The power in paradox comes not from solving the apparent problem but from exploring the tension as a potential source of creativity.¹¹

*“In tomorrow’s organization,
the only truly sustainable competitive
advantage is speed of learning.”*

– John O. Burdett

¹¹ In my work on organization culture I often use the paradox of “one culture but many.” To surface the paradox and enrich understanding I introduce the theme of African drumming. A group of African drummers, invariably, have different drummers playing different rhythms. What keeps the group together, what dominates is a single base drum. To bring paradox to life we actually bring in African drummers.



Network, network, network. Networking implies meeting influential or knowledgeable people who share a profession, industry or other common interests. Networking has seven potential benefits:

1. Awareness of what's going on outside of your immediate contacts.
2. Access to resources that wouldn't otherwise be available.
3. Better understanding the value of issues like diversity.
4. Share information and open the door for support and collaboration, e.g., between women who work for an organization dominated by men.
5. Raise your professional profile and grow your personal brand.
6. Exchange best practices.
7. An opportunity to see the world in new ways.

Knowing who, if possible, to bring into your network is best answered by the following questions:

1. What formal clubs, societies, professional groups, workshops or seminars would open up networking opportunities?





2. Who do I know who is plugged into the job market?
3. Who in the industry could connect me to new opportunity?
4. Who are the influence leaders in my profession? Social media can be extremely helpful both here and for the action below (#5). It should be added that in terms of value and trust, building an online networking relationship comes in a very poor second to meeting in person.
5. Who are decision-makers in my business vertical?

In many ways networking is readiness personified. Your network can fill gaps in knowledge, be an opportunity to test new ideas and accelerate even a seasoned performer through the learning curve. Successful networking means adhering to the following “rules”:

1. Never ask for help, ask for advice.
2. Confidences are sacrosanct.
3. Be comfortable in sharing your own (succinct) story.
4. Always deliver on even small promises.
5. Although networking should, ideally, be of mutual benefit, it’s important to recognise the difference between cooperation and collaboration. Cooperation are those occasions where both parties benefit from the networking experience equally. Collaboration is rooted in altruism. The relationship moves forward with the belief that “your success is more important than mine.” “Successful networkers display generosity of spirit.” –John O. Burdett.

A single stick is easily broken. Hold several sticks in your hand and what was easy suddenly becomes problematic. Networking is a little like that. Expand your circle of contacts, build new connections, develop collaborative relationships and you are sowing the seeds of emotional security, resilience and readiness.

“Fail to prepare and prepare to fail.”

– Benjamin Franklin



Explore different ways to “catch people doing it right.” Research by Gallup¹² reveals that only 10% of employees are asked how they would like to be recognised. In a similar vein, only 23% of employees feel that they receive meaningful recognition for the work that they do. Not only is this a missed opportunity in supporting retention,¹³ employees that do receive the right recognition are four times more likely to be engaged.

In any future endeavor, self-confidence is an important and often critical ingredient of success. Without self-confidence, “play to avoid losing” rules the day. Without self-confidence, the art of the possible falls prey to a myopic focus on the immediately attainable. Without self-confidence, boundaries defined by others describe where the action stops ... not where opportunity begins. Without self-confidence, victory remains a “hoped for” possibility. Without self-confidence, coming second becomes good enough.

To be self-confident is to see the glass half full. Self-confidence is the inner-belief that, given the chance, “I *will* get it right.” Self-confidence is knowing that to play an



¹² Jim Clifton and Jim Harter, Culture Shock (Gallup, 2023).

¹³ When people feel good about themselves, they are less interested in exploring other opportunities.



unheralded role in a successful project is more enriching than leading a noble failure.

Self-confident leaders are drawn to risk because they see risk as the gateway to possibility. Self-confident people are, in particular, comfortable with emotional risk. They confront those who do not live the organization's values ... they challenge the team leader if they believe the leader is on the wrong path ... they speak up in team meetings when what remains unspoken is holding the team back. By comparison, those who lack self-confidence wrap themselves in a cocoon of silence in the belief that blending into the background is a recipe for survival. The dilemma: holding back, not speaking up, being satisfied with the status quo, is to embrace mediocrity.

To be self-confident is to know one's self. To be self-confident is to know one's limitations. Self-confident people are comfortable asking for advice simply because they don't spend their lives protecting their ego. For the same reason, self-confident people are equally quick to offer help ... even if the individual in question is a rival. No less important, self-confident leaders do not long hold onto what might have been ... where others see failure, they see untapped wisdom and future opportunity. To be self-confident is thus to fail fast, learn from past mistakes and move on.

Self-confidence is anchored in our identity. It is part of who we are. That doesn't mean that self-confidence is a constant. Even the most optimistic of us flirts with the fear of failure. Even the most resilient of us is tempted to listen to self-talk that says "hold back, you may not be up to the challenge." To be self-confident is to be able to surface our self-doubts. To be self-confident is to have the courage to drag uncertainty from the depths of our unconscious self, confront that which holds us back and negotiate a positive outcome.

The relationship between self-confidence and affirmation (catching people doing it right) is clear and obvious. Fear of the future erodes self-confidence. For evidence, look no further than the world of sports. Affirmation is guided by the following:

- Affirmation must be *authentic, accurate, meaningful and well deserved*. Anything less and the leader is stepping into the murky waters of manipulation.
- Affirmation must be *specific*.
- Affirmation must *describe the overt behaviour* (that which is observable) and not drift into comments about the individual (their presumed beliefs; assumptions about attitude; conjecture around why the individual acted in a certain way). The rule: *performance and not personality*.



- Affirmation, by definition, should *focus on the positive*. With that in mind, affirmation should reinforce and point to the behaviour you want ... not congratulate someone on the cessation of behaviour you don't want. When a habitually poor time-keeper has turned the corner, for example, the feedback should reinforce the merits of being on time and not extol the virtues of not being late. When someone has overcome the tendency to speak over someone else who is speaking, the feedback should emphasise the quality of the individual's new communication skills and not dwell on giving praise for giving up a dysfunctional habit.
- Make the feedback *fit the occasion*. Gushing praise for a small, albeit successful, act makes it tough to appropriately reinforce a major breakthrough.
- Affirmation that *surprises* the employee creates far greater impact than an established action that can be anticipated.
- *Timing* is everything. The general rule: affirm the action as close to the event being described as possible.





It's very difficult to change people (*hard change*). There are two things a leader can do, however. One, display the behaviour demanded of others, themselves. To be a role model. Two, establish a business context where feedback based on getting it right is a way of life. A consistent message carried by the context is impossible to ignore. It also shapes individual and team behaviour in a profound way (*easy change*).

*“Self-confidence shapes what’s possible.
The power of catching other people doing it right
is that it establishes a habit whereby we learn to
catch ourselves doing it right.”*

– John O. Burdett

Set personal resilience targets. Traditional thinking around resilience defines it as “absorbing change and bouncing back.” It portrays the human spirit as a kind of behavioural elastic band – it stretches and then when the tension is released goes back to where it was.

In a steady state world “bouncing back” is an apt description. Unfortunately, we don't live in a steady, consistent, unchanging world. Today's environment is marked by disruption, uncertainty and, where technology is involved, exponential change.

In any conversation around change, language isn't important, it's everything. With the scope and nature of change likely to become even more turbulent, resilience seen as a way to reinforce the status quo isn't very helpful. Indeed, it's misleading.

A more relevant approach presents resilience as pushing to the edge, being comfortable with being uncomfortable, adapting to the new state, reflecting on the experience and developing new ways to behave. It's a dynamic rather than a static process. It's about leading and learning; not absorbing and then acting as before. Resilience means not only weathering the storm but being strengthened by it.



In assuming that resilience describes an individual's personal resources – as is often the case – we miss an important piece of the puzzle. Context matters and the right network, a support system and being around positive people make a difference. Leader's building "readiness" surround themselves with people who are resilient.

Accepting the plasticity of the brain, we can learn to become more resilient. There is a link, for example, between resilience and the research on positive psychology.

By comparison, if you are overwhelmed by unexpected opportunity, if you are overly anxious, risk-averse, trapped by yesterday's success, have difficulty facing adversity or are overwhelmed by life, resilience is spelt "resistance."

*"Only an optimist on steroids would assume that
you can reach a target that you haven't established."*

– John O. Burdett





Settle for nothing less than work that is anchored in a compelling purpose. Readiness has to be more than an inner voice that narrates intent. A rocket won't rise without the right fuel. A car won't move without gasoline and we (human kind) are pulled ever more towards mediocrity without something to drive us on.

The Bushmen of the Kalahari talk of the two hungers: the "Little Hunger" and the "Great Hunger." The Little Hunger refers to the physical need for food and sustenance. The Great Hunger speaks to the human desire for meaning, purpose and connection.

Ask top employees why they stay and there is constant reinforcement of the need for a successful organization to have a meaningful purpose. A major cancer hospital describes its purpose as "To cure cancer in our lifetime." A bionics company outlines its purpose as being to "Make the wheelchair redundant." LEGO, the world's most successful toy company, describes its purpose as "To inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow." Patagonia's way to be is dominated by a purposeful statement, "Earth is now our only shareholder." Meanwhile, purposeful investment funds have totally changed the capital market's landscape. Their overall theme, "Do well by doing good."

Think of the purpose as the creation story. Why the organization exists, its reason to be. A compelling purpose can be an out-and-out winning competitive advantage. But it has to be authentic. It has to capture what you are actually doing! Not what you want to do, or what you claim to be able to do. With discerning customers, if the purpose turns out to be little more than a marketing exercise, you are destroying the brand. And if employees feel the purpose is an empty promise then who you are today is the very best you can ever be.

"Readiness is powered by a compelling purpose."

– John O. Burdett



Conclusion

Ask an employee of virtually any stripe what concerns them most and it's likely to be future currency in the job market.¹⁴ “As the world unfolds at an unprecedented pace, will my skills and experience be relevant?” For those in a purely administrative role we are describing a fear-filled future.

In the past “discontinuous change” – what was is no longer and what has taken its place is all encompassing – created more jobs than those lost. The assembly line, which was introduced in 1913, is a perfect example. The unparalleled rise of manufacturing didn't necessarily create better jobs but, literally, overnight there were many more people who had jobs.

There is every indication that the discontinuous change we currently face will be different. New jobs will be created but it's very doubtful if more than a small



¹⁴ Currency in the job market means that no matter what the future holds, you will have skills and capabilities that are in demand.



percentage of the current workforce will be able to fill them. It's also the case that if you cut your leadership teeth in a command-and-control environment,¹⁵ tomorrow will be like visiting a new land where you don't understand the customs or speak the language.

For leaders it's a matter that many will be called but few will be chosen. There is a saving grace here. Leaders don't have a job; they have a role. In a job, success is measured against common standards. In a role there are requisite goals but beyond those a leader shapes the nature of their contribution. As a result, those in a leadership role have far more opportunity to be ready for tomorrow's uncertainty. In particular they can:

Read.

Engage the heart and enrich the spirit.

Ask great questions.

Develop coaching skills.

Intest time and effort into activities that "stir" the curiosity.

Network, network, network.

Explore different ways to "catch people doing it right."

Set personal resilience targets.

Settle for nothing less than work that is anchored in a compelling purpose.

¹⁵ Our work on culture around the world - especially as reflected in culture measurement - makes it clear that command and control is, by a clear margin, still the dominant organization model.



It's not easy to prepare for the unknown. Indeed, learn to expect the unexpected!
We can't anticipate what the future holds. We can, however, work to be ready!

*"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts."
– William Shakespeare, As You Like It*



Without
reflection
there is no
learning.



Key Questions

1. What business books/articles are you currently reading? How are you sharing/exploiting/building on those insights with your team?
2. To what extent have you achieved leadership balance? Where is more work needed? What do you need to start, stop, do differently?
3. Identify at least one great question that you brought to the conversation in the past week? Consider writing great questions down.
4. To what extent do those on your team view you as a master coach? Scale your answer from 1 to 10 – where 10 represents true mastery.
5. How, specifically, in the last week have you encouraged creativity?
6. What three things do you need to do to become a better networker?
7. Review the past week. When and with whom have you displayed “catching them doing it right”?
8. In building greater resilience, specifically, what are you working on?
9. Is your work framed by a compelling purpose? What is that purpose? Does that purpose get you out of bed in the morning? If not, what are you going to change?
10. When do you deliberately set time aside for reflection?

Note: The reader might well ask why has “the team” been omitted from the READINESS agenda? It’s clearly a central topic. One that is so important that it will be covered in a separate article.



John O. Burdett

*“Read.
The first four
letters of
Readiness.”*

- John O. Burdett

JOHN O. BURDETT has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations.

In 2019, his work with ABB's top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year. His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams

around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, John has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His most recent book is a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: *Without Breaking Stride*. To download his current business articles go to www.transearch.com/orxestra/downloads

