



# Are You The LEADER They **NEED?**

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***‘To inspire, the leader has to believe and convey with every strand of his/her DNA, not that this needs to happen – but that it **will** happen.’***

There are four things<sup>1</sup> an employee (regardless of level) needs – not wants, **needs** – from his/her immediate team leader.<sup>2</sup>

1. A clear sense of direction – where are we heading? How will the business environment evolve? Where and how is technology going to change the business? What will tomorrow look, sound and feel like? What is our unique point of differentiation? Who is tomorrow’s customer? *The head.*
2. The discipline of delivery – a cadence, a rhythm, a regular and continuing pattern of behaviour where the agreed outcomes and feedback regarding those outcomes are always in sharp focus. It’s about an organization that, by way of design, is agile enough to support tomorrow’s needed speed of delivery. In performance terms, it’s the need for everyone on the team to know where they stand. *The hand.*
3. To provide a learning environment – mentoring, coaching, stretch, building the team, a focus on learning how to learn. Currency in the job market. *The heart.*
4. That the leader in question is someone who everyone on the team respects and trusts – consistent, authentic, affirming, displays humility, keeps people informed, is tough-minded when he/she needs to be and, regardless of the circumstances, he/she listens, really listens. *The spirit.*



1 The Head, the Hand, the Heart and the Spirit, when framed within a business leadership context, was first published in *New Role, New Reality*. John O Burdett (2000). It has been a central feature in my work around leadership ever since.

2 This is an insight that is supported by my asking over 10,000 leaders in twenty plus countries, “As you look back, who was the leader, that you worked for or with, you admired the most? What was it about him/her that inspired you?”



A consistent and compelling performance ethos, day-to-day focus, an engaged workforce, and a sense of belonging – all draw heavily on the four leadership domains outlined above. Lack of leadership balance – behaviour skewed towards one of the above to the detriment of the others – and innovation and responsiveness become what the competition is really good at. Meanwhile, failure to fully deliver against any **one** of these (four) leadership imperatives and for those you count on most, the grass will inevitably look greener elsewhere. Guaranteed!

To lead is to hire, promote and build for succession – at a level of excellence.<sup>3</sup> Anything less is unacceptable. Nothing is more important. To be in a position of responsibility and lack mastery in hiring is to actively mismanage a critical business asset. The head describes success in strategic terms. The hand outlines what, specifically, needs to be achieved. The heart captures the people management capability demanded. The spirit is all about character. Character matters. And in these turbulent times, it matters a lot. Talent acquisition, specifically, and talent management, generally, that fails to embrace all four leadership characteristics is a gateway to mediocrity.

It is obviously essential to be “customer-centric.” But, what does that really mean? The head implies being fully informed as to where the customer’s business is heading. It’s to understand the customer’s emerging value proposition. It’s to see opportunity through the customer’s customer. The hand means getting inside the customer’s business processes, delivering on time and maintaining the highest level of quality. The heart recognises that the buy-decision is based on emotion. Selling is not simply how well you get across what you do or even how well you do it – it’s, ultimately, how you make the customer feel. The spirit is found in truth, authenticity and living the organization’s values. Spirit comes to the fore in passion, perseverance and, when needed, patience. It is also about challenging those on the front-line to improve the processes that dictate how the work gets done – and do so every day, in every way. Efficiencies that not only improve margins but, in the quest to remain competitive, enable the firm to pass part of the cost savings along to the customer.

In shaping the emerging culture, leadership that draws on the head and the hand can be termed as “cultural drivers.” Meanwhile, the heart and spirit act like cultural anchors. If they are not present, in full measure, being who you have always been is the best that can be hoped for. Don’t even think about implementing sweeping change (e.g., breakthrough technology) if the heart and the spirit are found wanting. From our own research and the work of others, only one company in five “manage” their culture. Then again, the organization’s culture will change whether you want it to or not ... if you are not attentive, in ways that are less than helpful.

So far so good, but even the leadership qualities outlined will likely not keep your high

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3 TRANSEARCH International and The Bedford Consulting Group – both of whom I support – utilise the Head, Hand, Heart and Spirit leadership template in their unique and compelling approach to talent acquisition.



contributors on board should the right opportunity beckon. They need more ... they need to be **inspired**. They need to believe that what we choose to call “work” is making the very best use of their time and ability. They need to be able to bridge the challenge they face today with what tomorrow’s success will look and feel like. This equates to leadership of an altogether higher order.

It’s not enough for the leader to communicate where we are heading. Gaining buy-in has to draw on language, imagery and story. To inspire is to make tomorrow’s success come alive in the room today. If you can imagine it, you can implement it. If you can see it, you can be it.

The “F” word is integral to what it means to be a successful leader. That said, it’s not enough to simply *focus* on execution. To inspire, the leader has to believe and convey with every strand of his/her DNA, not that this needs to happen – but that it will happen.<sup>4</sup>

It’s not enough to push for development and growth. To inspire, the leader has to display a personal passion for learning. Leaders are readers. They give full reign to their own sense of curiosity and draw it out in others. They see resilience not as bouncing back after a setback but learning from the experience and, as a result, being better equipped than ever. They build great teams. They ask great questions and, in doing so, transform *what is* into *what can be*.



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4 Having consulted to him for well over a decade, I am often asked, “What made the late (and legendary) leader, Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Fiat and Chrysler, special?” Simply put, he recognised that when faced with an unprecedented challenge, knowing what to do and how to do it doesn’t necessarily get you to where you need to be – you have to believe. He made you believe.



It's not enough that the leader be respected. To inspire, he/she she has to step down from the pedestal, look people in the eye and act in such a way that those he/she leads know, really know, that he/she cares more about their success than his/her own. To lead is to care. Caring is step one in engendering trust. Courtesy, meanwhile, as Peter Drucker pointed out, is "the lubricant of leadership."

For both the new and the seasoned leader there is some good news in all of this. Although we live in a time of unprecedented change – human nature is pretty much the same as it was when our kith and kin worried about sparsity of game, being a sabre-tooth tiger's lunch and/or the unknown visitor who just walked into the village with a very big spear.

In the midst of the human adventures that AI, robotics, cobotics, blockchain, 3D printers, autonomous vehicles and their like represent – members of the team still need to know where they are heading, how they are doing, that they are growing and that trust is ever-present. And, perhaps more than ever, they need to be inspired! In fact, it's fair to state that, "The greater the degree of uncertainty, the greater the need for leadership to embody the head, the hand, the heart and the spirit become."

Finally, we come to existential threats (the environment), black swan events (the 2008 financial crash), and because it involves human suffering, the biggest leadership challenge of all – tragedy. When tragedy unfolds and the human side of that drama isn't the organization's number one concern – when the heart and spirit is missing – then everybody loses. "Never waste the opportunity offered by a good crisis," is a quote first attributed to the Italian Renaissance writer Niccolo Machiavelli. A crisis is indeed an opportunity: *To show that you care!*

The *Coronavirus* disease (COVID-19) being a case in point. How the organization deals with these unprecedented – in this case life-threatening – events remains, indelibly, in employees' minds. And not just for those most at risk. The question customers and employees alike want to know is who are you? At times like these, "what do you stand for?" Beyond the symbolism, the sharp marketing and the self-promotion "what is the real story behind the brand?"

A crisis demands, more than ever, that to be a successful leader is to *employ* the head, *empower* the hand, *engage* the heart and *enrich* the spirit."

1. The future recast anew. The essential short-term actions must not take away from the compelling need to formulate the data/information and strategic insight demanded to put the business back on course as quickly as possible – *the head*.
2. To fully acknowledge the scope and impact of the crisis, craft a caring and meaningful response, act decisively, recognise the organization's role as part of a wider community... and do so at lightning speed – *the hand*.



3. The investment in teams and cross-organization collaboration pays off. People, regardless of level, unite behind a common purpose. The support for working remotely builds on and further develops knowing that you are part of something special. No one gets left behind – *the heart*.
4. Empathy is front and centre in everything the organization does and communicates. The alter ego of empathy is hope. Even during the darkest hours people need to be able to see the first glimmering light of an early dawn – *the spirit*.

Good leaders will engage some of the team, some of the time. Conversely, it takes a leader who brings leadership balance to the role, who knows how to inspire, who does inspire – to instill a sense of lasting commitment from all of the team. Leaders must lead! Leaders do lead. Are you the leader they need?

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*“The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.”*

Carl Jung.

Taken from: *Why Does Your Top Talent Stay?* John O. Burdett (2020).



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

His ongoing partnership with the Bedford Consulting Group and 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 holds a doctorate in management development and since 2000 has published fourteen best-selling books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. His Talent Trilogy was completed in 2016. The first in the series, *Attract, Select, Develop & Retain TALENT*, was published in 2013. The second, *TEAM: Align, Build, Connect and Develop*, came out in early 2015. *The Empty Suit*, in 2016. *The A-Z of Organization Culture* came out in 2017. *Tomorrow Will Be Different – Will You?* was published in 2020.

John has a number of books available for download. Go to any of the major, online bookstores. Access using author's name: John O. Burdett



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