

A leader's physical presence will make the difference

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I recently led a workshop that brought 20 individuals together. They had supported each other well during their five years of working together. Yet because they worked in a global online environment, their virtual relationships meant they had never set eyes on each other – until last month. So you can imagine the energy that filled that room. Suffice to say, they all benefited from a lot more than the workshop's content as they were all leaders in their own right.

For leadership to reap results, people need to connect and be willing to follow. Leadership without followers is simply a nice walk in the park. A leader's presence comes from connection on many different levels, yet the one most common among workplaces is that of a physical level. So how, and when, can the physical presence of a leader contribute to effective leadership and ultimately workplace success?

• The kick-off of a new project

When a new project or approach is launched, a leader's physical presence will add great value for a team. That leader is considered to have the essential knowledge and hence by providing direction, suggestions and roles to individuals, clarity and commitment will evolve. Expectations would be clear as effective teams will take the opportunity to ask all the questions needed to get the project off the ground. A leader has many duties and may not be able to stay physically present for too long at this stage, yet with the team now knowing the what, why and how, they should be able to progress independently. The leader's physical presence at the beginning of the project has set the scene for success.

• Intervention when the going gets tough

It is not uncommon for teams to become bogged down or stuck during regular business activity. At that stage, continuation will only lead to frustration, waste and actions that do not lead to the desired outcomes. The physical intervention of a leader will not only help the team through a barrier and challenge, but also demonstrate genuine care and connectivity. A leader's ability to seemingly navigate his way back into a project seamlessly implies that during the leader's absence, awareness of the state of project development is still acute. Not only does it show that the leader is in touch remotely with the project, but is also there for genuine care and support – enough to intervene, bring everyone back on track and then trust and provide space again.

• Individualised attention

There will always be individuals who learn at different paces, who require more one-on-one discussion and require more coaching or counselling. Few would agree that technology-based interventions allow fully connected access with an individual.

Physical presence has a positive impact in this situation. A personal meeting can facilitate openness and transparency, an open platform to sharing

reasons and further strengthening of the relationship; in fact at times this can make the person feel deserving of this dedicated attention, and take away focus from worrying about it.

• **Celebrate small wins, building pride in a sense of accomplishment**

With leadership functionality centred around development, progress and change when small wins and progress are evident. A great leader will always promote and celebrate these. The key contributor will undoubtedly receive accolades yet the leader will also be the facilitator of a community spirit, highlighting how the win belongs to everyone.

Leadership chronicles often compare genuine care and heartfelt praise to water for a marathon; without it, the wheels simply don't keep turning, and the race will not be finished. While a personal email of thanks is possible, could it be yet another opportunity for "lost in translation" through written words, as so often these days? How can one translate unlimited authenticity, personality and genuine care without those all-important non verbal signals, the body language that carries 80 per cent of a spoken message.

There is absolutely no doubt that those leaders who have physical presence nourish relationships on a meaningful level, influencing the buy-in of all around. The additional synergy my global group of 20 leaders displayed is living testament to that. There is also absolutely little doubt that a well-structured "schedule of presence" provides the followers with space to contribute to a leader's vision, knowing that the leader will be back in the group at a dedicated time. Is it any wonder that active and visible sponsorship is the No 1 reason for success with leading change? Yet beyond all doubt, physical presence, when also combined with and supported by a leader's mental, emotional and soulful presence, can take a team's and individual's sense of belonging to a whole new level.

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