

Debbie Nicol: Leaders step up if things get tougher

Debbie Nicol

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In times of economic slowdown, we often hear of budgets being slashed and projects being put on hold, waiting for a more appropriate time.

On the surface, all this is well and good, demonstrating compliance with directives from above. However, it is simply impossible for a leader to let change go, because leadership is a way of life, a mindset and an inner drive that has no bounds. It never goes away.

A great leader will always personify a future they see, being compelled towards change. Whether that leader is the Syrian farmer who wishes to re-establish the Damask Rose (used for perfumery and Turkish Delight) once the war is over; the mother who campaigns for the compulsory use of child safety seats in cars; the teacher who supports and enables reading habits for disabled children, or even the chief executive who sees a more convenient way to service a customer, there is no doubt that these people care for a cause, whatever the reason.

Perhaps they've seen the benefits of plentiful roses and aromatic townships, can intuitively see a better world with greater reading or are feeling the frustration of continuous negative feedback from customers.

Regardless, their efforts and focus is relentless, and negative conditions simply spur them on harder. They beat all odds and just keep going because of sheer belief, grit and determination.

Organisations often put projects on hold because of economic slowdowns. When this affects a [true leader](#), time and focus will simply be redistributed.

The time spent on the project may now well be devoted to attracting more followers and supporters for when things get better, or spreading the word without digging into financial resources. A dream does not simply stop because financial resources dry up or new laws are introduced to sanction certain behaviours.

A true leader never becomes bogged down by the detail of "how", yet stays with the outcome that brings greater efficiency or effectiveness.

So why do we see performance wax and wane in organisations during downturns, budget cuts and law changes? Why don't organisations just "keep on keeping on"? Does it mean that we don't have true leaders holding the leadership titles? This could be one possible reason – sometimes people hold positions purely for the package and prestige rather than caring for the job and its requirements.

Yet as organisations mature and accountability emerges, it's questionable how much longer this will last.

Another possibility may be simple overload, yet the adage "if you want something done, give it to a busy person" may well apply.

True leadership will always exist across boundaries. Leadership demonstrates amazing resilience to just keep going, with this influence

spreading beyond the confines of job descriptions and organisational hierarchies. So this is what a true leader will do to ensure performance across all levels of an organisation to retain maximum opportunity for results in the darkest of times:

A) They will be even more visible and active

People find solace in those who are there for them at any and all times. This allows them to be seen, their belief to be felt and their never-ending positivity and determination to be experienced. A true leader is never locked away for long and recognises not only the benefit of their public profile for the cause, but also the benefit of hearing the perspectives of others in harsh times.

B) Their message will remain consistent

This is key. People believe those who perennially personify a future, rather than believe "this" one day, and "that" another. The message will remain the same, and a great leader demonstrates how it will still be possible even in the current reality. Even if revenues are down, even if trends are against us, the dream is one that will still serve. Dreams drive reality.

C) They will offer hope by painting the picture of the future

A great leader is often a storyteller. Powerful stories allow the audience to see the story in their mind's eye, as the imagery and hope compel. Leaders find ways to emotionally connect a person to a future, by allowing that person to become a character in the story as they relate to it.

True leadership can never be diluted, nor can it go away.

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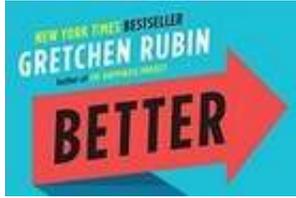


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