

Fear factor does not hold back effective leaders

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September 13, 2015 Updated: September 13, 2015 02:04 PM

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A recent trip to see Rwanda's mountain gorillas had me sharing a space in the jungle for an hour with some of the most amazing creatures on Earth. The sheer size and bulk of those silverbacks, made famous by the naturalist Dian Fossey and immortalised on screen by Sigourney Weaver in *Gorillas in the Mist*, cannot be taken for granted. They are powerful beasts of the jungle, with faces so human-like, behaviours so social and physical capabilities beyond what we can imagine. When sharing the photos with friends and family back home, I heard a chorus of disbelief: "Wow, great pics – weren't you scared?"

This common response to my experience floored me. No I was not scared – not at all. Fear simply did not enter my mind at any stage of the one-hour adventure. Yet why is it others would not enter the jungle if invited, coerced or even paid for by a complete stranger? With that in mind, why doesn't fear enter a leader's mind?

1. A successful corporate leader is by nature full of curiosity, exploring new spaces and places. Throughout the journey, curiosity is accompanied by questions, excitement and possibility. Building a future dream brings the opportunity for imagination and requires great creativity. In the jungle my senses were on high alert, absorbing the gorillas' aroma, postures, attitudes and noises. With all of that under way, there's simply no room or time for fear.
2. A successful corporate leader cannot operate in isolation, choosing to work in an all-encompassing environment. A leader is forever on the lookout and viewing the big picture, never fearful of dwindling stimulus. I was surprised by how the gorillas were constantly demonstrating new ways to interact with the jungle, and each other. Every single leaf, stump, tree or mound of dirt represented opportunity for new activity.
3. A successful corporate leader has no fear of standing alone, simply because it will not happen. The passion becomes contagious. Others feel the reality and want to jump on board to assist. When stories are told, hopes are shared, reasons are understood and the audience simply keeps growing through self-conviction. In Volcano National Park, I was in awe of the ranger's conservation efforts and successes, the demonstrated initiatives that clearly had taken time and hard work, and I was already wondering how I could contribute to help.
4. A successful corporate leader has no fear of being caught out as there is nothing to hide. What you see is what you get with a "real leader"; rarely are facades, airs and graces present. A voice is clear with a strong message that serves. Trust is commonly high with great leaders because all actions are delivered with consistency and transparency over long periods of time, which continue to reinforce what is already believed. The behaviour for which the leader is known comes to be expected. During my many adventures over the years of being up close and personal with nature, I have

developed an overriding feeling of trust with nature. Deep in those jungles, I am just being myself, and I have nothing to fear.

I learnt some time ago that what a person focuses on will happen and I saw a great example of that in our jungle group of six. At one point during the experience, I swung around and asked the lady behind me to take a photo on my behalf. I was surprised to notice her teary eyes and the lack of control in her hands when she held my camera and subsequent fumbling and stumbling over twines on the forest floor. A myriad of thoughts flashed across my mind: she had a choice – she could be frightened or choose not to be – and only she could lead herself through that decision. Yet I was having none of it; fear was most certainly not on my agenda.

Fear takes time and effort; it shuts us down, freezing possibility and potential in its tracks. Curiosity, when teamed with focus and progress is effortless when aligned to a dream. Which emotional investment do you choose – and are the dividends worth it?

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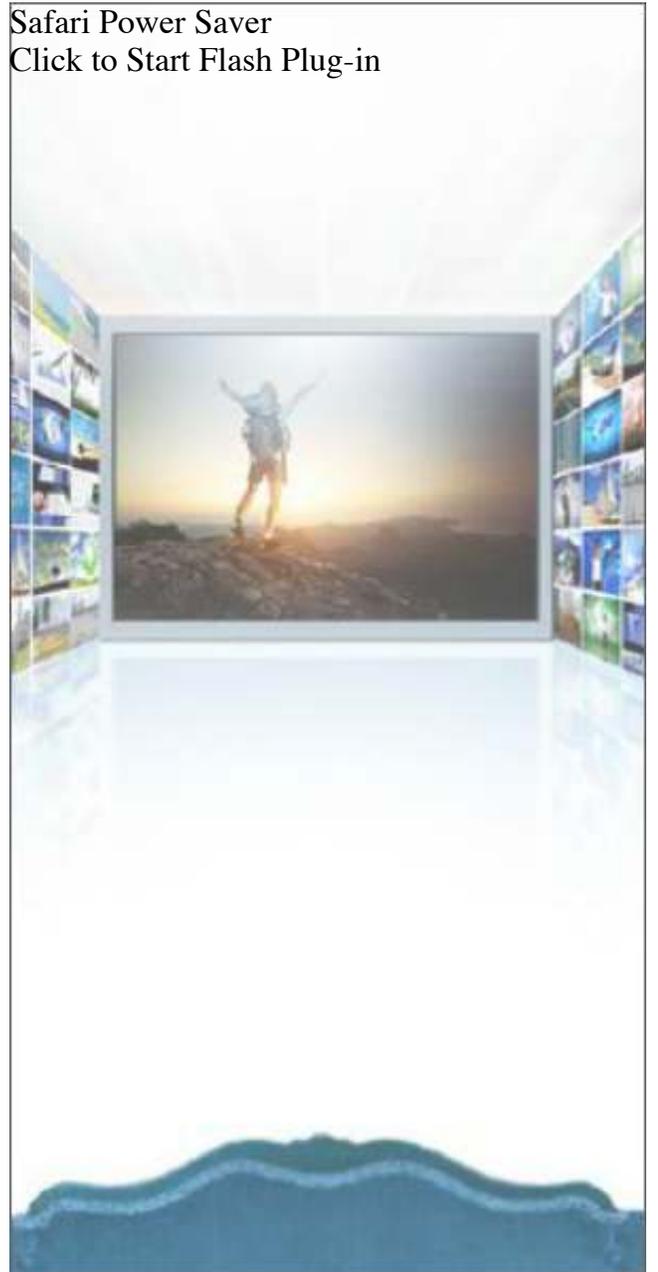


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