



LIVING LEADERSHIP

A Practical Guide for Ordinary Heroes



George Binney
Colin Williams
Gerhard Wilke

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Here is what other leaders said about *Living Leadership*

“By living along-side real leaders for extended periods of time, the authors cut through the ‘how-to’ leadership oversimplification and provide extremely valuable insights for those in leadership roles.”

Kai Peters, Chief Executive, Ashridge Business School

“This book strips away the mystique of the heroic and charismatic leader and helps you lead more effectively.”

Konstantin Mettenheimer, former Senior Partner, Freshfields, Bruckhaus Deringer

“[*Living Leadership*] gets to the core of leadership: the gritty reality, not the acceptable face or academic frameworks.”

Paul Heiden, former CEO, FKI plc & Group Finance Director, Rolls Royce plc

“... it’s not just a management book. It’s more like being on a psychoanalyst’s couch. You feel like the authors are getting into your head, empathising with the way you feel and helping you with your thinking.”

Quentin Poole, Senior Partner, Wragge & Co LLP

“... an unvarnished account of leadership in action, with all its anxiety, uncertainty, false certainty and crippling expectation. [The authors] dispel the myths of leadership, they eschew recipes and homilies; instead they give us some real insight and wisdom into the constraints and possibilities of ‘living leadership’.”

Bill Critchley, Organisation Consultant

“I have used the ideas from *Living Leadership* to help me take up new leadership positions on two occasions: they are pragmatic and helpful.”

Kai Siedlatzek, Vice President, Finance, Volkswagen Argentina

5 Get help

... and know when to give it

I've discovered the true secret of happiness ... and that is to live in the now. Not to be forever regretting the past, or anticipating the future; but to get the most that you can out of this very instant ... Most people don't live; they just race. They are trying to reach some goal far away on the horizon, and in the heat of the going they get so breathless and panting that they lose all sight of the beautiful, tranquil country they are passing through; and then the first thing they know, they are old and worn out, and it doesn't make any difference whether they've reached the goal or not.

Jean Webster, *Daddy Long Legs*, 1912

In this chapter we talk about the third leg of *Living Leadership*: leaders, coming alive in the moment and being able to use all their intelligence and intuition, feelings and emotions. This is enabled by having the humility to ask for help when you need it and having the courage to offer help to other people when you see they need it. We learn to know ourselves well through interacting with others, using feedback as a powerful way to increase self-understanding.

Living Leadership is subtle, contextual and involves working on a number of levels – rational and emotional, strategic and operational, task and relationships. Leaders cannot say in advance exactly what will be required in a particular situation. They have to be there in the moment to work it out. It is the capacity to bring all their faculties to bear that enables them to do so.



Cutting free from unreal expectations

We repeatedly found in our research that leaders knew more from their experience of life than they gave themselves credit for. There was a tendency to put the leading of people and organisations in a box labelled “business management and leadership” and act as if all their other experience of life was of no account. Yet, those with varied experience of life often had the wisdom required to lead others. Parenting, for example, was an extraordinary source of insight.

Leaders need to remember what they know – and be willing to keep learning. Much of the understanding they have about people and situations is what is needed, exactly because they have learnt lessons instinctively or intuitively and cannot spell them out in simple formulae.

Examples of the life experience we saw leaders use were:

- A French woman who had become used as a child to living outside France and moving from country to country as her father’s jobs in a multinational changed. She was a very

engaging, lively personality but also something of a nomad. She was very skilled at asking questions and finding out new situations – including the company and business she had come in to head.

- Another leader had been widowed twice. His determination to make the most of the moment and live life to the full – which was a huge asset in his leading – seemed to be related to these tragedies and the way he had responded to them.
- Another leader was a single parent with a young teenage daughter. She had learnt to juggle different responsibilities, to focus on what she was doing in the moment and to set clear expectations about what she could and could not offer in the different parts of her life. This capacity was a great strength when leading others at work.
- One leader had clawed his way up in the UK from a working-class, Irish family and now led people in an organisation where he was surrounded by people from privileged backgrounds and the best schools and universities. He had acquired a determination and persistence which was a large factor in his effectiveness as a leader.

Understanding the whole of yourself – good and bad

If leaders are to bring themselves to leadership, they need to be self-aware – conscious of what drives them and their impact on others. We all know that when you get a leader you don't get the ideal competencies that job adverts often specify. You get a package – good and bad, competent and less competent, strengths and weaknesses. What we saw in the research is that it's the imperfections that make leaders interesting.

Your demons – understanding what drives you

A colleague noticed that a leader he was working with had a BMW 8 Series, which seemed rather strange. The leader was a shy man and having a powerful executive car seemed out of character. "Why



did you choose that BMW?" our colleague asked. "I bought it for my Dad", the leader said, "to show him that I am successful". "What did your father say?" enquired our colleague. "He said, 'Mercedes are better'."

Throughout our research we were conscious that an intense personal drama was being played out for each of the leaders. It was not simply a matter of professional life and work. The whole "being" of the leaders was involved. Fundamental questions about their competence, their identity and their purpose were exposed. At times it was exhilarating. At other moments it was a white-knuckle ride, testing them to the limit.

Each leader, it seemed to us, was engaged in a personal quest, seeking to learn something about themselves as they worked with others. Often this took the form of a self-imposed test. They seemed to be asking, "If I go into this new area or take on this new responsibility, will I be OK? Will I be competent? Where are my limits? Will I survive?" The leaders seemed driven not only by how far they could climb up the career ladder; they were also preoccupied with internal "agendas" that drove them to work beyond the limits of their previous experience.

A key issue for the individuals we observed (and thereby for their organisations) was how they dealt with their "demons" – that nagging part of themselves that demanded attention or resolution. Did they seek to suppress or deny these demons or did they seek to accept and work with them? We believe that if people can understand their demons and appreciate them for their positive, as well as negative, impact, it helps them to be successful leaders.

Leaders – trying to fix something through work with others

We saw a powerful paradox in the leaders with whom we worked. They had an inner strength and security that made them capable of surviving in very tough conditions, of displaying the durability and resilience needed to be effective. They were impressive people. They had a self-possession and confidence that others

warmed to and wanted to follow. They “held on” when many others might have been shipwrecked by the storms to which they were exposed.

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At the same time they had a drive and determination that was fuelled by restlessness, a sense of inadequacy, a drive to push and go further. They were driven to make up an inner deficit – a need to prove or demonstrate something. They were trying to fix something within themselves through their work with others.

Leaders are both ordinary and extraordinary. They behave just like other people but they are also attracted by a need to speak for and act for others as well as themselves. They want to represent and speak for a “we” and do something to, and with, a larger group. They want to be on the stage; or failing that, to play a powerful role behind it. If leaders perform successfully while on the stage, it is thrilling for them. It validates them and bolsters their sense of self-worth. To see a consummate performer with a crowd like Bill Clinton, who comes alive with an audience, is to see someone who is driven to prove himself and who finds himself when able to speak for and with a crowd.

The literature is full of the competencies and qualities a leader needs to be effective or transformational. What is explored much less is why the leadership role is so attractive to some people. Why do they want to be the “chosen one” who represents others? We think it is the “inner drive” that is the key here, not the outer expressions of strength and competence.

The “demon” inside

In our view, every individual has “demons”. These are issues or themes resulting from their formative experiences in life that they continue to work on as an adult. Sometimes these