



Inspirational Leadership

It is sadly quite frightening. I have just reviewed the outcome of a large programme with one of our multinational clients. They are not short of academic brilliance, or indeed good ideas. They simply cannot put it together. They are looking for mechanical processes which will in some wondrous way create the answer. When I was last lecturing at London Business School I discussed this very point with one of the professors who commented, 'Sadly, David, many of today's students of business think it is all about clever analysis and a form of close study. They don't realise that business is about doing.' This bothers me greatly.

In many of our programmes whether within the Consultancy or on the Teams side of the business I see many talented pleasant people. What I don't see is inspirational leadership. I see the ability to analyse situations, but seldom do I see people come forward with the determination to set their people on fire to deliver against strong odds at times.

We are becoming obsessed with meetings and consensus management which adds delays to solutions, allows key issues to be minimised and for some form of mysterious collective security to breed. If you examine the successful entrepreneurial companies behind every key decision is generally the person who stands with most to gain and most to lose. He or she is the one who lives and breathes the issue and demonstrates the determination to see it through against fierce competition and market warfare. In these cases the stakes are high but the will is there to overcome the odds. Unfortunately many large companies have managed this type of attitude and behaviour out of their business. There is no room for the hard-hitting determined 'let's really go for it' person any more.

In this complex cocktail of management behaviours I constantly hear how important it is to manage upwards. This is another euphemism for not having either the power or the will to make an obvious but radical decision. Companies have taught individuals when and where to ask to be excused to go to the 'little boys room'.

Recently I have been running a number of conferences for senior managers. Exactly the same sort of behaviour is in evidence. At question and answer sessions (real fear for some important people) some individuals ask interesting and relevant questions. These are usually the people who care about the business and front it to their customers every day. They know what the service is really like – for they have to pick up the pieces and respond to the complaints. They know where the processes are broken, yet can they get a straight answer as to when they will be fixed or who amongst the highly paid panel of the great and the good is willingly prepared to take the ownership for fixing it? Can they hell. You can see the heads in the audience go down; the mood swings to one of disbelief and disappointment.

The front line people want inspirational leaders. They want the problems resolved and the waste taken out of their business. They want the slack systems tightened; they want praise from the customer and not cynicism from their colleagues. Real leaders shake their companies to the very roots. They cut through the petty nonsenses and inspire excellent service. They are prepared to walk into the open and draw the fire. They can put it on the line and demonstrate that they 'will do it'. Leadership in today's companies is not a soft option. Unfortunately it is becoming a scarce one.

David Ankerson

MANAGING DIRECTOR

INCITE™ MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Ankerson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.