

DOES TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP LACK A TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE?

FRONTIERS IN LEADERSHIP RESEARCH, EXAMINATION ESSAY BY POLYA ROSIN

SYNTHESIS

This essay focuses on several aspects which are undermined or left out in transformational leadership – namely the contagious smile (i), genuine interest in people (ii) and the power of finding and using people’s inner motivation (iii). These gaps, unless seen on time and filled in, can create flaws in the transformational leader and bring him to failure not just as a leader but also as a colleague and partner. In order to illustrate this, this essay is based on Badaracco’s quiet leader¹ and Dale Carnegie’s basic principles for successful human interactions² and managing through people³.

THE CONTAGIOUS SMILE

“It creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in a business...”²

As I turned the last page of “Leading quietly” I could not help but stare at the book in surprise – for there was not a single mention of the power of the smile. Badaracco’s leader is just a human – has fears, doubts and mixed motives¹. Yet doesn’t he as a human know just how much a smile and positivism can do? The face of a person is nearly always the first thing we see and his “state of mind” is the first thing we perceive via his facial expression and small gestures. All of us would prefer to negotiate or work together with a person who is optimistic and has a smiling face and a happy body language. The latter does not refer to the artificial smiles some sales representatives put on today but to a genuine feeling of optimism and happiness. “Your smile is a messenger of good will. Your smile brightens the lives of all who see it...Especially when that someone is under pressure from his bosses, his customers...a smile can help him realize that all is not hopeless – that there is joy in the world...”². Thus, a smile and positive attitude are truly contagious and have the strong power of getting things done. These are tools which should be in pocket number one of the bag of the successful leader. They are one of the key elements in human relations and as such are highlighted in Dale Carnegie’s work^{2,3}.

The positive mood of the leader has already been shown to strongly affect group members⁴. Under a positive leader the group experiences more positive mood, more positive affective tone, more coordination and therefore requires less efforts from the leader for motivating and coordinating. Moreover, it has also been shown that the leader has a strong influence on the positive affective climate and team optimism⁵. Team affective climate has been

related to job satisfaction, commitment and performance⁶. So doesn't smiling mean putting minimal effort and getting maximal output?

A leader who manages to keep and transmit his positive thinking could be perceived as charismatic (in the very positive meaning of charisma). Charismatic leadership is said to be the result of an attribution based on followers' perception of their leader's behavior, especially if the behavior helps building a positive vision and fosters an impression of the importance of the followers' mission⁷. These leaders tend to interpret and integrate information in a positive way; they are engaging and emotionally expressive and have a positive view of the future. Since one of our inner drives is to be seeking happiness, we are drawn to people who are smiling and positive, we are ready to listen to them and cooperate with them. Yet that is nowhere to be found in Badaracco's "Leading quietly".

Barry White, the singer so close to mine and many women's hearts, shared in his autobiography what his mother told him when he was a little kid – "You have a choice in life, to be happy or angry. Please be happy as a gift to yourself"⁸. Well, now it turns out it is not only a gift to us but to our colleagues too. "Yet, it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is no earthy good to anybody till it is given away"².

Is it difficult to smile and keep a happy spirit all the time? Yes, it is but it is also the remote state every leader should be in if he is to achieve long-term success. And if the transformational leader is just a human, he should not forget that the smile is an essential characteristic of human character – we smile and we like people who do so sincerely.

GENUINE INTEREST IN PEOPLE

"Sometimes when I consider what tremendous consequences come from the little things – a chance word, a tap on the shoulder, or a penny dropped on a newsstand – I am tempted to think that there are no little things" Bruce Barton¹

The little things...Such are the small gestures and little time one takes to show interest in people. Indeed, the power of the little things is tremendous. Yet, does transformational leadership fully explore it?

Talking about the transformational leader being just a human, isn't there another very obvious gap in Badaracco's advice? As humans, we like to be liked, we like when people show they care about what we think/feel/work on. As a consequence, we trust more the people who are interested in us; we are more "predisposed" to them, more willing to collaborate with them. Isn't that a characteristic of human nature which can be a powerful tool for success?

After reading "Leading quietly" I got to learn a lot about how to handle difficult and challenging situations. But it seems to me I was being told to be interested in the "insiders", to watch them; to be interested in those who can give me more information as I drill down to solve a problem; etc. Getting people to like you enough to assist you in a difficult situation is not a result that can be achieved if the right amount of effort is put once you are troubled with something and having in mind your agenda. No! The interest has to be sincere, not agenda-driven and nourished all the time. Dale Carnegie writes: "Alfred Adler, the famous

Viennese psychologist, wrote a book entitled 'What life should mean to you'. In this book he says: "It is the individual who is not interested in his fellow men who has the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. It is from among such individuals that all human failures spring."²

One of the most difficult tasks of a leader is getting the team/partner/boss to be open to him, to like him (professionally but also personally). The best way to achieve that is by showing interest in the other person and keeping it in a genuine fashion. It is one of the "little things" Badaracco does not talk about when trying to distinguish the everyday situations from the heroic "do-or-die" ones. Yet, it is the first principle in the little pocket book by Carnegie on how to make people like you. He writes: "I have discovered from personal experience that one can win the attention and time and cooperation of even the most sought-after people by becoming genuinely interested in them...It is a two-way street – both parties benefit"

There is another side to taking interest in people. It shows that the person/leader cares and he does not undermine that things matter differently to different people. What one considers of high importance, another person might consider as unimportant. Therefore, it is crucial for the leader to be interested in the people around him and know them well. Badaracco writes "The vast majority of practical ethical challenges facing managers are mundane, unglamorous, and subtle". Can one really say that? Every situation matters to somebody; to at least one person it is glamorous. Other people can not only be viewed as players in some kind of strategic games, players who have their own agendas. The others should also be considered as human beings who have feelings, interests, motivation drives.

Last but not least, knowing what the other person's interests are, allows a good leader to present every challenge in a different light – in the light of the other person's interests. Talking in terms of the other persons interests is a principle in Carnegie's work, important not just for "management through people" but also for successful human-to-human interactions. Badaracco gives an interesting example with a political figure close to a mayor who manages to persuade him and her colleagues to re-think and withdraw from an important decision. She does it by following Carnegie's principle of talking in terms of the other persons' interests. However, while Badaracco highlights that this political figure succeeds in the situation because she manages to buy time and drill down, he fails to stress on the importance of (i) knowing what the other person's interests are and (ii) talking in terms of these interests. Thus, is transformational leadership forgetting just how human we are?

USING PEOPLE'S INNER MOTIVATION DRIVES

"You can lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink." British proverb

Bass et al wrote that "Transformational leadership refers to leaders who, through their personal influence, cause changes in their followers' beliefs, values and attitudes. This can be accomplished through one or more of the factors that constitute transformational leadership: Charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration...."⁷. Frankly speaking, this did get me confused. Bass writes about charisma in

transformational leaders. Badaracco writes “They weren’t charismatic, had little power...”. But charisma is not the only characteristic Bass stresses on while Badaracco does not. The other is inspirational motivation.

The best way to get people to collaborate is to find their motivation drives and switch those on. But how does one find these? Aren’t I asking for too much? Does a leader have the time to find the source of motivation of his colleagues? Well, this is an investment but it is one that has full refund potential. Devotion to a task comes from an inner motivation and it takes devotion and motivation to see through a challenge, to be willing to invest in solving a problem, to be engaged in helping out. As Carnegie writes, “First, arouse in the other person an eager want. He who can do this has the whole world with him. He who cannot walks a lonely way”. Motivating people is central if one is to carry out leadership along Badaracco’s advice but yet it is missing in the “to do” list.

As I did research for this essay I came across ideas from the so called Veracious Leadership⁹. “The leader recognizes that teamwork is essential for a productive organization and the collaboration is needed to develop the commitments and skills of the associates to solve problems and respond to environmental pressures. Fostering collaboration is not just a nice idea it is the key that leaders used to unlock the energies and talents available in their organization.” Fostering collaborations however requires positivism, interest in people and making people motivated. A productive collaboration is one in which all parties involved are interested and one in which all parties involved are motivated to carry out. Why is that so? It is because of the same reason, again and again – we are simply human beings, we care about our interests, we want to do work because WE WANT to do it and just because we are told to. Realizing this and managing it is a key to successful human-to-human interactions and such interactions are the core of successful transformational leadership.

The work of Bass et al. mentioned above also shows that a charismatic, successful leader manages to foster an impression of the importance of the work of his colleagues. These findings highlight yet another principle in Carnegie’s work – “make the other person feel important - and do it sincerely”. As humans, we like to feel important and we want the others to perceive the fruits of our work and our efforts as very important. A good leader should know this and should be able to use it but do so sincerely and not only when in need, not only show interest in the insiders, not only try to motivate the those who can help out in times of trouble but all colleagues and partners.

Altogether, shouldn’t we, before learning specific leadership techniques for how to buy time and drill down, first learn more about humans and how to have a healthy, happy and productive relationship with people? So here there are in short – these basic ways of having successful relationship with people: smiling and keeping positive, being interested in other people, motivating them and making them feel important. Shouldn’t these be at least in the introduction of every book which aims at telling leaders how to perform better? Isn’t (as Dale Carnegie puts it) managing through people the most successful way of leading? Shouldn’t that be considered in transformational leadership?

BADARACCO AND CARNEGIE AT WORK IN THE LABORATORY

“Science helps you prove others are dump” Zazzle Laboratory T-shirts

Everyday work puts in front of any of us numerous and complicated challenges. However, while working in the laboratory as a young scientist, a PhD student, most of the challenges one faces involve fellow PhD students. In such situations, it is interesting to notice that both Badaracco’s and Carnegie’s principles are applicable. Frankly speaking though, I do believe that it is the combination of both that would make a person successful in his relations and leadership crusades. Importantly, I would add that Carnegie’s principles should come first. Discussing the example of the high-ranking political figure, Badaracco writes: “In this context, listening, persuading and bargaining, along with the occasional reminder that she was working on behalf of the mayor, were indispensable to her success”. Let’s not forget that in most of the situations a PhD student is to act as a leader, he is in no higher position than the other people involved. This means that, such a student will have to rely on persuading and bargaining. And isn’t it easier to do so with colleagues who like you, colleagues who are interested in what you have to say, colleagues to whom you will speak in a way to wake up their interest and feed into their own motivation? In other words, differently from the funny Zazzle saying mentioned above, science should not help you make others feel dump. It should stimulate your mind to find ways in which you can make others feel important, feel like they matter and like they work is outstanding.

In summary, the best way to solve a problem or bring a project to success is with people who are truly devoted. Therefore it is essential to make your colleagues like you and trust you, to make them genuinely interested to work it out together with you. To be able to do this is a skill - a skill which one needs to master before becoming Badaracco’s transformational leader. To be able to do this is a skill and “He who can do this has the whole world with him. He who cannot walks a lonely way”¹⁰.

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