Leading People
… beyond the banality of 'leadership' …

… a brief introduction …

During a recent casual conversation, a colleague asked me when I had my first experience of leading people. Having thought about this, I'm still not really sure how to answer.

Was it when I was captain of the football team I played for during my late teens?
Was it during my time as a school teacher in the north of England?
Or was it when I employed the first people in my own company in 1988?

When I first found myself with the responsibility for *Leading People*, I had no idea of the challenges involved. I had received no preparation whatsoever, not even the platitudes that are so frequently presented as "Leadership" in standardised training courses. I had never even read a book on leadership. I learned on the job, which is positive, yet also resulted in some outcomes that could have been avoided had I been more aware of the complexities inherent in the role.

Did I have any idea what I was doing?
Perhaps.
Perhaps not.

However, one thing that was intuitively clear to me even at this time, was …

As a nominal leader, you are always, inevitably, the living example to everybody else of how you want to work and interact with one another.

This was over 30 years ago. Still today, I continuously hear appeals for support from leaders who may be experts in their field and have been prepared for leading business initiatives, but begin floundering when confronted with the challenges of leading people.

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> Leading a business … healthily, ethically, successfully … is fundamentally about leading people … which necessarily incorporates leading oneself. There is no separation. Simultaneously, you are dealing with pressure from superiors (some call them bosses), those who report to you, perhaps organisation politics, perhaps regional political pressures, business challenges with customers, suppliers, competitors, partners … while needing to support, nurture and challenge employees positively … while communicating unpopular decisions that may affect the lives of others and their families. The pressures can be relentless.
>
> For anybody holding a nominal leadership position, such as founders, senior managers, executives, department heads … the key responsibility remains …
>
> *… to lead people so that they naturally, intrinsically work to enable the business to thrive …*

Business is about people; technology is a supporting enabler.
This will never change.

Exercising a role that constitutes being a nominal leader is a highly significant context-marker for all interactions with others who come into contact with you and your organisation.

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Leading People is a highly challenging proposition.
The challenges are continuous.
Meeting these challenges constructively is in itself an unavoidable challenge.
How can we do so?

We work simultaneously in numerous fields that are so often presented as separate issues. They are not. All are so intricately intertwined with one another that they are, in fact, inseparable. Included among them are …

…culture … communication … ethics … dignity … values … focus … orientation … clarity …
… expectations … diversity … conflict resolution … intrinsic motivation … rewards … self-awareness …
… and more …

… merely a small sample of the natural seeds that feed the organisation environment, an environment which needs to be healthy to enable it to thrive.
How do these seeds interact with one another … and their environment?
How are they relating with one another?

And here we can summarise one fundamental aspect of the work of … Leading People …

… working on the Quality of Relationing while focusing on the business …

Working on this starts with "me".

Leading People is Inside-Out Work.

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Let's get Personal …

Dear Reader,
Feel invited to create a list of your personal experiences of Leading.

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Here's mine …
o I have led my own companies for over 30 years.
o I am a father.
o I have captained sports teams.
o I have coached sports teams.
o I have worked closely with board members, founders of established businesses with hundreds of employees, leaders of divisions responsible for a turnover of billions of dollars per year, and many more … learning continuously.
o I have designed and implemented hundreds of training programmes.
o I have designed and facilitated countless programmes on leading people.
o I have facilitated and moderated hundreds of events around the world … (Note: I do not consider facilitating and moderating to constitute 'leading'. Nevertheless, in this role, others see you as centre stage even when you take yourself back.)

Despite my learnings from these experiences and the continuous conscious processing I have been doing over many years …

I cannot <u>teach</u> you how to lead people.

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Notwithstanding the claims of universities, business schools, so-called "leadership" experts and purveyors of leadership training …

Nobody can <u>teach</u> anybody else how to lead people.

Neither can anybody train anybody else to lead people. Any kind of formulaic "how to" approach could more aptly be described as manipulation rather than training.
To be perfectly honest, I am not in the least sure that anybody needs formal training in "leadership" … whatever this may mean.

However, when people continuously say that they wished they had had some preparation for their responsibilities as nominal leaders before taking them on, it is important to listen.

And it is possible to support, not teach, not train … by encouraging people, especially leaders, to look inside themselves and access the potential and goodness that is there.

How someone feels about the world and the issues and challenges they face … is inevitably reflected in their actions. Because learning how to lead people is inside-out work, we need to begin by looking inside.
Try asking yourself …

> **_Who am I?_**
>
> **_What makes me who I am?_**
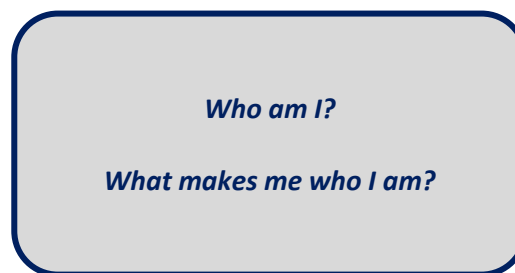
Everything we need in order to lead people, so that everyone together can lead the business well, is already within us. We merely need to access it.
This is where genuine coaches, facilitators, consultants can offer support to leaders … by sharing experiences, asking provocative reflective Questions, sharing learnings from our own lives.

Leading People in business is about far more than business.
To lead people healthily, we need to look beyond the boundaries of business.
How we lead people reflects our philosophy of life.

The conscious DOing remains all important.

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How do we face the challenges we meet?

Leading People … healthily, ethically … is not rocket science.
However, the hidden traps the role incorporates, as well as the pleasant and unpleasant responsibilities are impossible to escape.
As a leader, there is much you can influence and a great deal of significance over which you have little to no influence whatsoever.
And you are always … always … working within constraints.

As a nominal leader, you are responsible for providing clarity …
… even when little may appear to exist …

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Welcome to the beautiful messiness of life.
Welcome to the realm of peopling … where people will be people …

Like any aspects of working with people, leading is highly complex … simply because … we humans are complex BEings.

When you are leading people, you are leading a group of unique individuals, each one complex in their own right … who need to work together effectively.

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Teams: A Potential Misunderstanding

A note to those who think they are "leading a team" … Please think again.
You are not!

You are leading a group of unique individuals who need to work as a team.

This distinction is essential.

Each individual is continuously making their own decisions … consciously or subconsciously … on whether or not they are actually prepared to walk with you … and if so … how.

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The totality and complexity of the issues are actually far too multifaceted to deal with comprehensively in a brief article, so we're not even going to try.

Nevertheless, let's look at a couple of essential Questions that highlight the complex nature of some of the key challenges.

You may wish to use this opportunity to reflect, not only on your responses to the Questions that follow, but also why you think you responded in such a manner.

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Looking Inside
An Initial Reflection Question

> *What is really … REALLY …*
> *important to you in your*
> *interactions with other people?*
>
> *Why?*

This Question highlights one of the key principles of Leading People … how we wish others to interact with us is how we need to interact with them … even in the challenging and uncomfortable situations that will inevitably arise.

Leading a business is about leading people in such a way that the individuals
automatically, naturally engage with their work together with their colleagues.

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There is always at least one, bigger Question.
Here, the core overriding Question concerning your role … for yourself as a leader … and everybody you work with ... is ultimately … always …
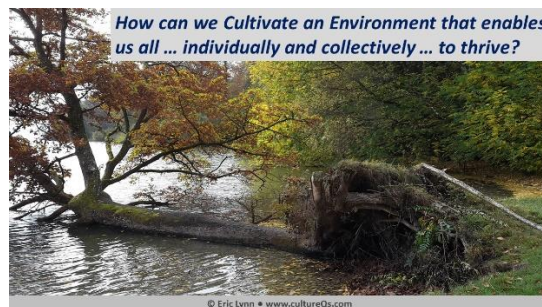
It's the same Question that people need to address when focusing on Cultivating a Healthy Organisation.

Can a company be successful without addressing this Question?

Of course, it can be financially successful. There are thousands of such companies everywhere. Well-known examples that fit into this framework include the technology giants that have become household names, weapons manufacturers, tobacco companies.
All of these are examples of unhealthy companies whose profits derive from physical and/or psychological violence, before we even think about environmental health.

Nominal leaders in these companies are not leading people.
They are manipulating people, sometimes even exploiting people.
And this, in my view, is not the kind of leadership or work that anybody should be interested in.

In such an environment, it is not possible for people to thrive.

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A brief overview of the most significant fundamentals of Leading People …

The following diagrams outline the three fields on which we focus when working on Leading People. Each incorporates so many additional Questions and challenges that, however many we included, any graphical representation would necessarily be incomplete.
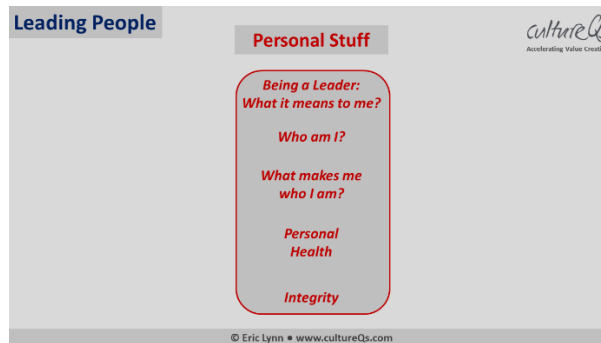
"How are we experiencing these challenges … individually and collectively?" … is a Question worth asking.

The Basic Basics
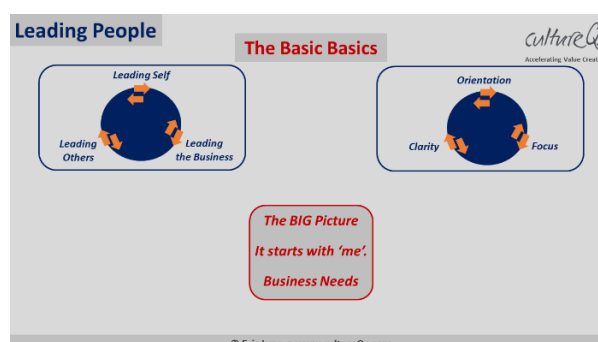
Personal Stuff
Looking inside ourselves.

A Selection of the Challenges Looking Outwards

Any responses which individuals or groups may offer should not be confused with the misguided notion of "solutions".
Seeking solutions to technical problems is both natural and appropriate.
When working with humans, we need to look beyond solutions into the messy world of relationships.

The challenges are continuous.
Meeting them constructively and generatively requires a deeper dive.

A further Reflection Question … Trust … Trust is always a Question …

Some years ago, I was approached by the founder and owner of a technology company that had grown to 500 employees in 4 European locations. He related the following problem to me.

"For a while, I made the mistake of accepting the aggressive leadership style from the head of one business unit. A number of key people resigned. I have now fired him and promoted Rainer as a replacement. However, not everyone is engaging with Rainer as freely as they had been doing previously. Especially Harry, they're no longer even talking with one another. These are all good people and excellent professionals. Can you help?"

After conducting non-attributable individual interviews with a small group of people named by the company owner, we met for a re-focusing workshop during which everyone was invited to hold undisturbed conversations with one another. We then regathered to reflect on the interactions, Harry's contribution: *"I'm extremely grateful for this opportunity. I now recognise that I was reacting to Rainer on the basis of my negative experiences with the previous head of this division, transferring my lack of trust in him to Rainer. Rainer doesn't deserve this. We all need to learn to interact with one another on their individual merits."*

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Who we trust and how we trust and the foundations of the decisions we make consciously or otherwise, significantly affects the quality of our relationships with one another. It also affects how others perceive us, especially when we formally hold a nominal leadership position.

Feel invited to reflect on this Question:

> **Who do you TRUST?**
> **How do you TRUST?**
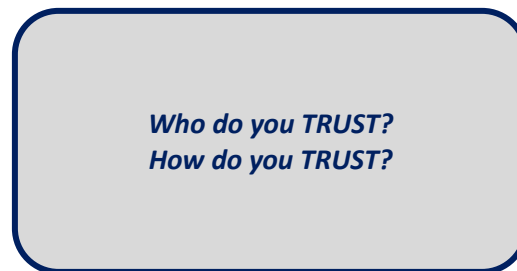
Now, you might like to try the following …
Invite a trusted friend or colleague to join you.
You both answer the Question individually, aloud, without interrupting one another.
Together, reflect on the differences, especially the differences in nuance in your responses.

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Here again, we are faced with the whole complexity of ourselves as unique human BEings.

Each individual's perspectives are unique and may or may not be shared by others in any group.
As a consequence, we are unable to predict the behaviour of others in response to anything we may say or do.
We can only guess.
We can however influence possibilities by simply … BEing human … by opening ourselves towards others, by Questioning, by inviting, by listening intently … and more.

And this leads us to yet another significant challenge for anybody in a nominal leadership role in today's world …

> **… to lead as an integrated Human BEing …**

It's time to forget the lists of skills and characteristics for leaders generally presented in business schools and executive programmes. Some items on these lists are undoubtedly important. Nevertheless, they will always remain insufficient for dealing with the daily complex human-related challenges we face.

It's time to forget the stories of so-called heroic leaders who are supposedly the examples for us to follow if we want to be successful.
Heroes are mythical characters. Even when real people are portrayed as heroes, in this cloak of heroism they remain mythical characters.

Leading People has nothing whatsoever to do with being heroic.
It has everything to do with being human … while focusing on the needs of the organisation that you are leading.

We can only truly lead … in a manner that others feel inclined to walk with us … by attaining inner clarity and the orientation and focus that such clarity provides.

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Leading and Following: A Potential Misunderstanding

Following is not the "opposite" of leading.
Leaders do not need followers.
Leading People is not about getting others to follow.

Leading People entails cultivating a space in which people experience a sense of orientation, meaning, in which they are able to focus … together … so that they consciously decide to walk with you, the nominal leader, themselves taking responsibility for leading their work, perhaps other people too.

There is no separation.

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> *"Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy, and it becomes impossible to deal with our world's existential problems: climate, coronavirus, the battle for truth."*
> (Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech)

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Ultimately, we lead others by BEing a Human with integrity.
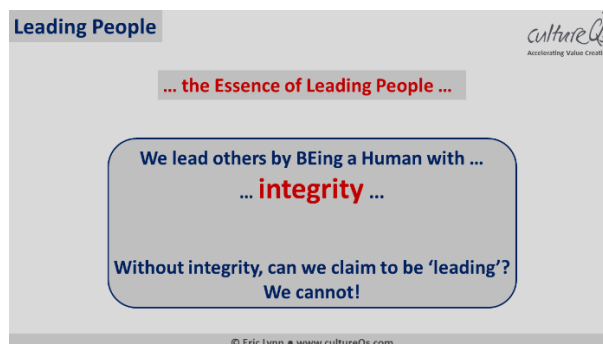
This is the true essence.

Without integrity, nobody can claim to be leading.

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The **Leading People** Programme is available to organisations. It is also for available for groups who wish to self-organise. The Programme can be conducted in English or German.
Details: https://cultureqs.com/leading-people/
Please contact me for further information.

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