

BUILDING A STAGE FOUR TRIBAL CULTURE

A few weeks ago, we introduced you to "[Tribal Leadership](#)" and the various tribal stages. In this edition, we want to explore how as a leader you can go about establishing a stage 4 culture.

It is crucial that we make clear that both the concept model of "tribal culture" as well as the concept of leadership, is not confined to corporate commercial entities. Leadership is, wherever you find yourself responsible for leading others toward a particular goal or outcome. So, our view is that these concept ideas are portable across various scenarios and contexts.

So this article is a blend between some of the Tribal Leadership theory from (Logan, King and Fischer-Wright) and our experience on how leaders can operate and create a stage 4 culture.

So, let's begin the conversation:

Let's remind ourselves again about what a stage four culture is.

Characteristics of a stage 4 culture:

- Everybody seems to be equal during discussions.
- Rank is not used to "advocate" and dominate proceedings; rank is dropped to open the doors for creativity and innovation to flow from whence it wants to come.

- Values driven behaviour and relationship building predominates how the team manages itself. Team members have all bought into a "compelling noble cause", a cause which is bigger than themselves and into which they can make a meaningful contribution, bringing significance to their lives This noble cause is a pronouncement of a future state that a group/team will bring about through a coordinated effort.
- All activities and decisions are based on values and stuck to, no matter the circumstances.
- Everybody is encouraged to be networkers, alive to opportunities to put the right people together (across boundaries) to discuss and work through problems and challenges. The environment is filled with pockets of people, buzz-groups and triads discussing and finding solutions.

Benefits of a stage 4 culture:

- Greater collaboration toward a noble cause.
 - ▶ People work together towards a noble cause, propelled by their values
- Fear and stress decreases.

- ▶ Fear and stress go down as the interpersonal friction of working together decreases
- Engagement increases.
 - ▶ People's engagement in work increases, and they go from "quit on the job but still on the payroll" to fully participating
- Organisational learning becomes effortless.
- Health statistics improve.
- Competitive strategy is easy.
- The environment is more alive and more fun filled.

To transcend to a stage 4 culture as a leader, you must lead. You must possess a particular set of qualities/skills, maturity and wisdom. Otherwise, try as you may, you won't be the right person to help the group or team to transcend.

"So how do you as a leader develop the capability to lead at stage four?"

Life, your best teacher

"Sucking the marrow out of life doesn't mean choking on the bone."

(Robin Williams in "Dead Poet Society")

It would seem that life (your ally) conspires to help you to transcend to lead at stage 4 and be your brilliant best by initiating you through "great moments of grace and truth". These "moments of grace" may come in the

disguised form of a major disappointment, tragic events like a serious health scare; or a failed significant relationship etc. In other instances it's just an incremental series of events, behaviour patterns, mind-set grooves that just isn't serving you anymore. The aim is not to punish or sadistically torment you but to move you up and beyond yourself. How else will you wake-up from your deep sleep of complacency? To operate as an effective and credible leader at stage four, you not only need this "rites of passage" but the insight that come from it.

Leaders, who seem to make "the rites of passage" to level 4, have understood that life is bigger than them. They also find their purpose by cooperating in the creation of something really bigger than themselves. For leaders who are open to the "rites of passage" it can be painful, quick, dramatic, and redemptive. While for others, sadly, it can be a lifeless long suffering, like trekking through the thick molasses of life. This brings with it much collateral damage as the unwilling initiate rejects submission and change.

Corporate and organisational psychopaths will never yield to this call to truly transform because they are self-serving, opportunistic, ego-centric, ruthless and shameless but who can be charming, manipulative and ambitious.

As a leader, you therefore either transform to transcend or you regress to stagnate and taking the culture with you in whichever direction you choose to go.

"A generation of men is like a generation of leaves, the wind scatters some leaves upon the ground, while others the burgeoning wood brings forth - and the season of spring comes on. So of men one generation springs forth and another ceases."

(Homer - The Iliad)

"So what qualities do you need to lead at a stage 4 culture?"

1

Walk your Talk

(Commitment to core values)

St. Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

If you want to gain commitment you must model what you expect of your team members. To model effectively, you must first believe in your organisation's values, vision, mission etc. The first step you must take is to clarify your personal values and then expressing them in a manner that is genuinely your own. What you actually do is far more important than your words when expressing how serious you are

about what you say. Your words and deeds must be aligned. Very good leaders lead from the front! You do this by setting the example in your day to day interactions that shows you are committed to your beliefs and that of the organisation. You can't enforce your values on your team, no matter how hard you try or how much power you have. You will end up getting an uncommitted band of followers, simply complying but not engaged. And creating shared values is what really helps to sustain engagement.

2

Shared Vision

(Commitment to a noble cause)

"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

"Rivonia Trial - Nelson Mandela"

Pretoria Supreme Court, 20 April 1964

As a Leader you must have a desire to make something happen at the level where you work, to change how things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before.

In some ways you must learn to live your life backward i.e. start with the end in mind. You must see pictures in your mind's eye of what the results will look like even before you have started. Your vision seen only by you is insufficient to create an organised movement or a significant change in where you work. Others will not follow until they accept the vision as their own. *"So you as a Leader cannot command commitment; you can only invite them, call them and inspire them to build something bigger than themselves, something significant".*

To solicit your team's support towards a shared vision you must:

- Really know your team members. What makes them tick and what ticks them off?
- Relate to them in ways that inspires them.
- Understand their needs.
- Have an intimate knowledge of their dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values. Only then can you solicit their support.

3

Innovate
(Continuously
improve the process)

"Innovation is the central issue in economic prosperity." Michael Porter

As a leader operating at level four you must continuously look for ways to improve your processes, products and approach. See yourself as a pioneer, one who is willing to step out into the unknown. Opportunities must be sought out to innovate, grow and improve. Be open to allow the innovation to flow. Remember, product and service innovations tend to come from customers, suppliers etc. *while process innovations tend to come from the people doing the work. So engage them now!!!*

I once heard a story about a very large South African organisation who were about to spend millions of Rands redirecting a series of critical piping systems through their factory. Gathered at the site for a few days were senior management and top consulting engineers figuring out how best to do this. Observing the team struggle to come to a workable solution was a low ranking artisan who made a few suggestions and ultimately saved the organisation millions. This artisan, that year went on to become the employee of

the year and won the organisation's top employee award. The only pity to my mind was that the artisan was not included as part of the brainstorming solution team from the outset. Now I think the organisation has learnt the power of including those who often work at the coal face.

As leader your main contribution is to search for opportunities, to recognise those good ideas, support those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system in order to get new products, processes, services and systems adopted.

When operating at a level 4 culture, innovation and change requires you to experiment and take risks. One way of dealing with the potential risks and failures of experimentation is to approach change through incremental steps and small wins. Small achievements when stacked on top of each other build enough confidence to meet even the biggest challenges. Invest in the capacity of your team to take control of challenging situations and become fully committed to change. It is an absolute fallacy to think that your leadership credibility is based on you having all the answers. It is the

opposite. It's your ability to be open and invite input.

4

Share your power (Empower others to act)

Leadership is not a one person show, it involves others. Level 4 leaders make it possible for others to act, to get on with the job. Teamwork goes beyond your immediate direct reports; it also includes others across the organisation. In today's "virtual" organisation, cooperation and collaboration cannot be restricted to a small group hunkered down in their silos; it must include peers, managers, customers and clients, and suppliers. You have to involve, in some way, everyone who must live with the results, and you must make it possible for others to do good work.

No one does their best when feeling weak, incompetent, or alienated. Those who are expected to produce the results must feel a sense of personal power and ownership. The old command and control leadership approach no longer works.

Instead, you must now work to strengthen others to deliver.

Sharing your power as a leader is what is required at level four. When you give others more trust and more authority they are more likely to rise to the

occasion and produce results which will exceed even your expectations.

5

Recognise and acknowledge

(Don't ever forget to say
Thank you and well done!!)

The climb to achieve one's goals and dreams can be tough and filled with several challenges and setbacks. On the journey people will become exhausted, frustrated and disenchanted. They will be tempted to give up.

Your leadership encouragement can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions.

It's part of your leadership job to recognise contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. Encouragement is a serious business. It's how you visibly and behaviourally link recognition with performance. Celebrations when done with sincerity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinary tough times.

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We would like to thank the seed ideas from Kouzes & Posner, Logan, King and Fischer-Wright. We really enjoyed also using our vast consulting organisational experience to integrate with their work.