

Changing the way we change – leading the sceptical, the stubborn and the gently bewildered

“Change” is more than a business school process. We must shape the discussion, influence, challenge, adhere to values and inspire. Paul Gilbert explores the quality of leadership needed for influencing and encouraging transition in sensitive areas such as attracting and retaining younger members, distilling the wisdom of older members while encouraging diversity and preparing for a seismic shift in what the public demands from the legal profession. Will your Association enlighten the debate or man the barricades?

Walk around any bookstore and sooner or later you will come across literally hundreds of books on leadership, on change, on transformation, on process improvement, on personal improvement, on team development... Shelf after shelf after shelf after shelf.

If the weight of this literary contribution is anything to go by, is it any wonder that “Change” and “Leadership” sound like subjects done to death?

So let me state my case at the outset - I am **not** going to make an argument for some new fangled process; there will be neither trite slogans nor clever acronyms. I am **not** going to pretend to have an insight beyond that which we could all bring and I am not going to recommend anything that we will think contrary to our own intuition.

So why am I here? A self-confessed “nothing to say, nothing to sell” consultant!

I am here to make change accessible and achievable and to argue that leadership is not about clichéd stereotypical imagery, but about the quality of influencing and thoughtful communication we practice.

I am also here, if I am honest, to present my vision of change and leadership as an antidote to the overly simplistic and the falsely evangelical.

Maybe it is because I am a natural sceptic, but I have always disliked unfeasibly toned fitness gurus telling me that if I wobble around on an over large beach ball it will give me “abs” like theirs. I distrust the autobiographical books by retired CEO’s that tell me to “think success” to make the difference. I also object strongly to legions of sharp-suited teenagers strolling around established businesses making life-changing decisions for hard-working people when they themselves haven’t yet figured out that in the real world work is not organised into semesters!

I object, basically, to the “quick fix” and to anyone with an attitude that suggests that anything tried and trusted is inadequate if not given a makeover of some description.

I think my first serious life-lesson on this subject occurred when I moved from one big job to another about ten years ago.

In the one company I was considered a star performer; someone at the top of their game making an important contribution. I was surrounded by talent and the company was a great success.

I then moved to a company that was much less successful, in fact it was badly broken as a business and eventually had to be sold or it would have failed completely.

It made me realise two things:

- First, I was not as good as I thought I was! And
- Second, my new colleagues were just as talented, just as committed, just as capable of success as my former colleagues, but they had not had a chance to show what they were capable of delivering.

The lesson for me was very powerful; I learnt that success is only partly due to the talent pool - it is an important part, but probably less important than the quality of leadership and the way our people are organised to allow them to flourish.

It also convinced me that any team and any company (any Bar for that matter) already has the talent, the intelligence and the ability to effect changes that will make that team or company (or Bar) much more successful.

No books, no gurus, no acronyms required; we have the talent within all of us already; so my job now is to explore how we can lead our organisations to bring about lasting and effective change relying on **our** talent.

The issues to cover therefore include:

- What are the obstacles to change and how can we anticipate better what they will be?
- How does influencing and relationship management sit at the centre of all successful leadership?
- What parallels are there with the UK and the significant issues being faced by the legal profession there?
- How might legal services develop globally as a result of those changes and how can Bars in the US be part of shaping the future, not just being shaped by it?
- How should we lead debate when we do not control participants or outcomes?
- What are the requirements for engagement and how can we encourage behaviours supportive of our agenda?
- What will be the signature profile of a diverse, valuable, and positive Bar going forward?
- What are the essential disciplines for increasing the probability of success?

This will be a practical, pragmatic session; I hope it will be challenging, but encouraging at the same time. The wisdom of ancient Chinese philosophers may not be something we should dwell on for too long, but I like the words of Confucius who said:

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I’ll remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.”

As a template for leading and effecting change, it is not a bad place to begin.

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