



# LEADERSHIP

*A publication by Neela Bettridge Ltd*

# What sort of leader do I want to be?

*This is a sample of the blogs I've written in the past few years on the subject of leadership. I hope you find them helpful, inspiring and thought-provoking as you ask yourself the question, "What sort of leader do I want to be?"*

## How leaders can shape authentic company values

Does your company have a set of official values? Do you know what they are? Does it matter to you that they are coherent and authentic?

For some people, company values are a bit like office wall art – nice to have, but not to be taken too seriously. (And that's ironic, as they sometimes do end up as office wall art.)

My position on company values is that we do not take them seriously *enough*. As a discrete project, those who ideate and sign off on the company values might well give the initiative their all – but only briefly, and only in the way that we get very serious about our new year's resolutions, before letting them fall by the wayside, one by one, as our enthusiasm wanes.

Why do I think we need to take them more seriously? Because appropriating people's internal worlds is a dangerous, potentially very alienating game. And as millennials take over the workforce, with Gen Z not far behind, authentic and coherent messaging is absolutely paramount. These are the generations that have been utterly swamped by messaging. Our list of values has to work hard to hit home.

Take a look at employee engagement company 6Q's blog post listing [examples of various big-name companies' values](#). As I read them, my frustration grows and grows: 'What does "Be bold!" actually mean in practice?' "We are one team"? Prove it to me!'

And it's not just the expression of the values that suffers from wishy-washiness. Take [this article about the issue](#) from BrightHR, which includes the hedge-betting claim that "when your workplace is known for a strong culture built on real values, word can travel fast. Your reputation as an employer could grow, meaning more people will want to work for you." Word *can* travel fast; your reputation *could* grow.

Yet note how the author of the post describes the values in this list: 'brilliant!' There seems to be a tendency in many quarters to blithely assume that if you create a list of values, your work is done. Not a bit of it – deciding what you'd like your values to be is the first step on a very long and difficult journey.

Here are some pointers for ideating and working with your company values.

## Recognise the difference between senior and junior staff

It's obviously incumbent on senior members of staff to embody the values. But then, it's pretty easy for them. They get paid better; they don't do the menial work or feel they're the ones to pick up the pieces when things go wrong higher up or company strategy does a 180.

So how do we get more junior members of staff to embody it, too, those members of staff who have less investment in the company? Perhaps we *don't* expect them to. Perhaps we acknowledge that our values are first and foremost a pledge by the company, not a set of commands.

### **Acknowledge that it's really hard to make core values coherent**

And don't expect people to swallow them whole. Ask for staff to point out the contradictions. Generate an ongoing discussion around them. Reach out to the public for feedback on how you're doing against them. Ask new hires to do the same, to tell you if they make sense. If you get this right, if your values imbue every area of the company (not just the walls) in a way that is all-consuming, junior and new members of staff will echo the values of their own accord – or leave.

### **Accept that there will be 'contraventions'**

Company values are not rules and regulations. This is not a psychological dictatorship. The company does not own your inner world. Individualism of thought is the norm (and, indeed, a sprinkling of subversion is good for creativity). In a world where psychological diversity is increasingly valued, where mental health issues and feeling low are no longer taboo, [Yahoo!'s 'Fun' value](#) looks plain silly. When do you discipline someone for not being fun enough?

### **Throw resources at the values project**

After all, if they're done right, great candidates will notice. Produce videos. Create forums, both real and online. Prove to the workforce and the world that you value your values.

### **Introduce values at the recruitment stage**

Ask candidates if they agree with them. If they do, ask how they've embodied them in their daily lives. If they don't agree with them, ask why.

### **Make social good part of your values**

It's a turn-off for many people to be asked to align their inner world with a profit-making enterprise. A company does not have an inner world. So you can be up front about that: We are a money-making enterprise; we don't expect you to love the company for its values. But we commit to [these types of social good](#), at least, and you can take time out to get involved, if you'd like to, while working here.

### **Tech will inevitably lead to job losses, so how should leaders relate to it?**

Some might say there's nothing we *can* do, now that the so-called fourth industrial revolution is well and truly upon us. After all, the stats are startling. According to Oxford Economics, for instance, "[up to 20 million manufacturing jobs are set to be lost to robots by 2030](#)". Faced with those kinds of predictions, perhaps we should just accept our fate, taking whatever profit benefits we can get along the way?

Well, we could. It's true that [jobs will be lost](#). But if we interpret that as meaning that tech – whatever its other benefits – is simply a destructive force when it comes to employment, then we really are setting ourselves up for a fall.

If we don't try to work with tech, we lose our opportunity to ensure the one thing that humans are still unequivocally better at than robots stays in the conversation: creativity.

Tech plus human creativity is, well, rocket fuel. It becomes a tool for explosive growth. Tech without the buy-in of humans is just an efficiency tool – and one which, ironically, mean fewer humans are required.

It is incumbent on leaders to keep humans in the conversation. We must look at how tech can add value to our work and how we can add value to the tech; it's the combination of the two that is invaluable. (Our value is not just about creativity, of course: it's also about human workers' hard-earned and long-established expertise.)

And looking to create this combination should always be our first priority. Tech is, naturally, going to be viewed as a way to quickly cut costs. But don't let that become all that tech is for. After all, tech can even lead to job creation (an optimistic position shared by [this Guardian article](#)).

So how do we do ensure a healthy relationship with tech? We consult our teams. We open up the conversation. After all, everyone knows that tech is in the ascendancy and most have made some sort of peace with that. By pretending it's not happening, we're not kidding anyone.

This consultancy phase is not happening at present. According to [this piece](#), "almost six in 10 employees said they were not given a say on the use of new technologies."

There are some star employers when it comes to transparent integration of tech, [such as Siemens](#). But clearly not every company is like this.

If we want technological innovation to be creatively assimilated rather than disruptively enforced, that is down to us as leaders.

## Why leaders must see creativity as a collaborative endeavour

Creativity is being valued more than ever before by businesses. We're living in an innovation-driven economy, after all, and the automatable work is being automated at a faster and faster pace. What's left? The stuff that can't be automated (for now!): creativity.

So what does this mean for leaders? We have to find ways to unleash creativity, both **in ourselves** and in our teams.

One crucial assumption to move away from is that innovation is the remit of a select group of individuals at a company. The members of that group vary depending on the industry: they might actually be referred to as 'the creatives'; it might be the visionary CEO/Founder or C-suite thinkers; it might be the 'Content' team – or some combination of all of these.

The demands of the innovation-driven economy mean that creativity is now expected of just about everyone at some time or another. Here are some pointers for maximising creativity in your team.

## **Make creativity a collaborative exercise**

Part of the reason that creativity has historically been a solo enterprise is that collaboration has historically been nothing like as easy as it is now. What we are seeing from top companies is the power of collaboration allied to individuals' capacity for strokes of genius.

We should do this in our own companies. Think 'collaborative creativity' at all times. This will involve celebrating the creativity of everyone, and rewarding those who facilitate creativity in others. Creativity is no longer reserved by a select precious few. Egos and sensitivity have no place.

## **Strip out the hierarchy from creative ideating**

Creativity is not hierarchical. Leaders have to get the message across to all that there's no right or wrong. Indeed, 'wrongs', in the sense of mistakes or completely 'out there' or subversive ideas, can lead to rights in the shape of spectacular breakthroughs. Strip out the hierarchy from creative moments.

## **Recognise that creativity feeds off diversity**

Bring members of different teams together. The combination of what I call 'differently shaped brains' can bring about breakthroughs. Or simply a fresh pair of eyes, even if those eyes are not 'expert' in the department they're being asked to look at.

## **Encourage difference in your teams**

The more people can express their true personalities and backgrounds, the more kaleidoscopic the creative overlap between team members. And just because you're not 'classically' creative (someone recognised as such in their career, or who recognises themselves as such) does not put you at a disadvantage. In fact, it might actually be a boon. Creativity needs to come out of nowhere, and it might just be that you have a deep, abundant well if you've rarely tapped into it before!

## **Protect and nurture creativity**

Don't try to manage creativity – manage the things around it. Protect it as it is happening from such things as admin and efficiency considerations, from tracking and organisation and structure (especially, ironically, when that structure is put in place ostensibly to facilitate creative collaboration); and, as far as possible, protect the fruit of that creativity from the approval/sign-off process.

## **Leading without leaders: as hierarchical structures are challenged, what does leadership mean?**

Hierarchy has made a lot more sense down the years than it does now. Back when roles were very clearly defined and expectations about the output from each of those roles was more or less understood. Back then, rigid hierarchy was a great organisational system.

But that is no longer the case. Organisations are focusing more on diversity and inclusion. Problem-solving is coming from cross-functional squads. Creativity is being democratised (as a matter of necessity).

In this landscape, traditional pyramid structures are starting to look old hat. Nowadays we want to squeeze out all the potential locked into the myriad differences a company has in its ranks. To tie influence to position is to tie your company's hands.

In practice, what we're seeing more and more of nowadays are circular models of collaboration and shared responsibility. Groups, rather than individuals, are tasked with achieving certain goals or solving certain problems.

In order for such groups to be successful, diversity of thought is absolutely paramount. That means pulling in members of different departments for their differently shaped brains. Seniority goes out the window when you're contributing to a squad whose goal has only partial relevance to your area of expertise. In such squads, your very lack of expertise in certain areas is why you can offer something different.

Now I am not suggesting we should do away with managers, as Google attempted in 2002. Nor get rid of CEOs, [as Swedish software consultancy Crisp has done](#).

But whereas leadership in the past was intrinsically tied to and invested in structure, a leader must now help dissolve the creative constraints that structure can bring about. Assuming everyone in a cross-functional squad is more or less similarly qualified for the squad's objective, seniority doesn't come into it. In this context, leaders must help erode hierarchical behaviour (whether deferential or rank-pulling). We don't have time for it, nor psychological space.

What else should leaders in this meritocratic environment seek to do? They must champion creativity and celebrate those who facilitate it. They should demonstrate more diplomacy, vision, flexibility, humbleness and can-do attitude than ever before. They must earn the right to lead every day, without ever expecting to be treated with deference.

## **When diversity policies don't pay off: a guide for leaders**

We dearly want the case for diversity to be cut and dried.

There are now countless articles that take this to be so, making sweeping statements that assume the centrality of diversity, placing it at the centre of things in a tone that suggests 'Of course *diversity* is integral to business success, duh: it makes the world go round, after all!'. I give you:

"We live in a complex, interconnected world where diversity, shaped by globalization and technological advance, forms the fabric of modern society."

The [same article](#) goes on to say that "Many of us know intuitively that diversity is good for business".

The thing is, there are many other people whose intuition (or implicit bias) says otherwise. We must not be complacent about diversity. And we must not try to get round the fact that the business case for diversity is *not* cut and dried by ignoring that fact.

Even McKinsey, who have conducted two of the seminal reports on the effects on business of diversity, concluding that there is a pronounced link between diversity and profit, take pains to point out that they have not shown causation, merely correlation.

So what happens if there are no obvious business benefits? Do we start losing faith? My argument would be that, once a diverse workforce is in place, the entire landscape of the company changes. You will not be looking for a simple cause-and-effect chain (diversity manifestly producing profit) because the positive effects on the company will be myriad, nuanced and far-reaching. You haven't done a charitable thing. It will feel ridiculous that it was never this way, whether profits benefit or not.

Not everyone has to believe diversity is a business cure-all, sure to send profits through the roof. They don't even have to believe it makes the world go round. But we do need people in our teams whose sense that diversity is a good thing at the ethical level outweighs their reserved judgement about its business benefits. And that's why your inclusion policies have to be right if your diversity initiatives can hope to succeed.

## How to make a succession planning roadmap that really works

As I've pointed out in a previous blog, your succession planning roadmap has to be more than just a list of names kept on file somewhere. In fact, as maps go, it has to be more like the latest whizzbang update of Citymapper than some dusty old manual you chuck in the glove compartment. Here are my top tips for creating a healthy succession planning roadmap.

### 1. Keep the roadmap live

Make sure your succession planning roadmap is dynamically linked to and informed by other relevant areas of the business – most importantly, the logged results of staff training, development and performance reviews. If someone starts to shine in an area not previously identified as their strong suit, that should feed in to the roadmap, especially if the area this person's doing well in makes them leadership material.

### 2. Rethink the role of job specs

Why are job specs generally only circulated when that job is being advertised? Your company's vision for what is entailed by each and every role in the company should be public knowledge, available to everyone in the company (and arguably to the external world, too). And when I say "what is entailed", I don't *just* mean nuts and bolts – by the time the role is available, the nuts-and-bolts requirements may have changed. The job spec should include qualities, aptitudes and character traits that your company believes the person in any role should have. This encourages aspirational thinking in the workforce – junior staff can look at a senior role and know that, while they fall down in, say, experience or specific skills, they *do* have some of those natural traits the role requires (or could develop them) – and that encourages ambition.

### 3. Introduce the roadmap at recruitment stage

This is a tweak on the old 'Where do you see yourself in five years' time?' interview question. When assessing candidates for a role – however junior – it's worth speaking to them about where this particular role could take them. Tell them what other people in this role have gone on to do and ask questions from a roadmapping perspective – is there a more senior position they're aiming for? Are there other departments or areas of the business that interest them? Questions like these can not only elicit interesting interview material – the candidate's answers should enrich the roadmap documentation.

## Why leaders need more than emotional intelligence

Leaders need emotional intelligence – of course they do – but emotional intelligence is not much good if a leader can only demonstrate it in favourable circumstances. It's no use being a calm, sage, empathetic presence if you turn into someone else entirely when the pressure's on or things aren't going your way.

No, a leader must demonstrate emotional intelligence with *consistency*. To do that, emotional intelligence has to be allied to emotional resilience and fitness.

Our society has got very good at selling quick-fix calmness and yo-yo lifestyles. By that I mean dry Januarys that let you binge in December (and possibly February). Super expensive, hyper intensive HIIT classes rounded off with a green smoothie and a motivational pep talk about taking the good vibes from the class into the day ahead – good vibes that often last about five minutes, until you have to use public transport or get stuck behind a slow-moving tourist or cannot resist checking your email on your phone (while slurping the dregs of that kale smoothie).

What I'm saying is that we cannot *buy* a healthy mindset or consistent emotional intelligence. Mental health in all its forms is a long-term business. It is not found in the bottom of a plastic cup of kale juice. It can't be generated – with any longevity – simply by busting a gut in the gym. It cannot be created out of thin air by a session or two with a leadership coach like me – I can only set things in motion for my clients. It's up to them to embody the things we work on and make them a habit not a quick, short-lived fix. The difference sounds quite subtle but training in emotional fitness is not a *remedy* to stress or a binge lifestyle – truly embodied, it is a genuine alternative to them.

## Why there is a place for morals in leadership

The dreadful story [about Oxfam employees' sexual misconduct in Haiti](#) introduced a take on leadership that is rarely brought up in the modern world: morality. In response to the revelations that Oxfam staff used Haitian prostitutes, Penny Mordaunt, the international development secretary, called for the charity to show "moral leadership".

I think it was the close juxtaposition of the terms 'moral' and 'leadership' that really struck me. For in business, questions of morality are generally kept in the outer orbits. Some might even claim that to bring morality into business is painfully naïve.



But of course, there's certainly one contemporary business topic that has distinct moral connotations – diversity. Yet when writers discuss diversity, it's generally the business rather than the moral case that they seek to make. It's certainly the business case / generally try to make.

Yet I do also certainly feel a moral responsibility when it comes to diversity – as I do in many other business areas. I'm glad there's such a strong business case for diversity but it got me wondering whether there's any room for 'purely' moral considerations in business.

And actually, I think there is – moreover, as the fourth industrial revolution gathers speed, what we might term 'moral' discussions in business will become more urgent. That's because as tech takes up more and more of the pie chart of industrial activity, the focus on the human segment will become more acute. And that necessarily means moral as well as philosophical deliberations.

## Why leaders must encourage feedback to flow in all directions

What is it about feedback that makes it seem to move in just the one direction: downwards? Every now and then, yes, it does move sideways. But it very, very rarely moves upwards.

No, feedback is almost always something that passes from a senior team member to a more junior one.

It's as if the giving of feedback is a special right bestowed upon senior team members, a perk that more junior staff have not earned the right to enjoy.

But feedback is not a perk to be earned. Feedback is business bread and butter. Like hard work, putting the hours in and keeping your projects on schedule, feedback is simply something that makes a company tick.

Mary Shapiro has pointed out that "leaders can't hold everyone accountable because they can't possibly observe everything." When you put it like that, it seems so obvious. But we need to get used to passing that bread and butter around a little more, so that peers at the same level share it with each other, and junior staff members feel empowered to pass it upwards to their superiors. Business suffers otherwise.

As a leader who wants this bread and butter to be passed in all directions, the trick is to remind your team again and again and again that feedback is an observation on the work, not on the person who made the work. Keep on reminding your team, then remind them some more, until your staff finally take on board the crucial distinction between feedback and criticism. Get that bread and butter flowing freely!

## How young leaders can gain respect

I read with interest [this piece](#) from Deep Patel on ways that young leaders can gain respect from their teams. I'd like to add a few more:

### 1. Don't think of yourself as unique

I think an air of defensiveness comes through once or twice in Deep's piece – "prove your value as soon as possible" and don't forget you can fire that "insubordinate employee"! Relax. There

are more and more young leaders out there. Work sector mobility and increasing meritocracy means it's not such a strange thing for a young person to be the boss. You're one of many.

## 2. Keep on learning

Chances are your familiarity with the cutting edge of digital and technological innovation helped get you where you are. So now that you're inundated with the pressures of being the leader, don't neglect all those channels – blogs, Twitter feeds, industry websites – that were a big part of your learning. And go to cross-industry meet-ups to freshen things up once in a while. Keep looking at your own skills development.

## 3. Share your strategy

There's been [some research](#) suggesting that young leaders are perceived to lack strategic vision, a skill that – so the old wisdom goes – comes with experience. So go ahead and share your strategy with the team. If you're coaching young professionals, encourage them to do this.

## 4. Show commitment to the company

One criticism levelled at younger team members – particularly Millennials – is that they are always looking for the next opportunity, ready to jump ship at any moment, with [no loyalty to their present employer](#). Show strong leadership by demonstrating to your team that you're dedicated to the organization and are here for the long haul.

## How leaders can make working from home work for business

“Working from home”. I think for many people that phrase is weighted rather more heavily to the right than to the left: what they hear is “home”, and it sounds pretty blissful. But the reality can often mean a world-record-beating number of pushes on the snooze button, a leisurely breakfast (or multiple breakfasts, and another breakfast in the afternoon), a dishevelled appearance and swiftly diminishing productivity.

Here are some tips to keep your remote teams firing on all cylinders:

### 1. Get a room

Encourage your virtual teams to set up their space at home so that they effectively have a miniature version of the office. This is, of course, more of a psychological step than anything else. Setting an area or a room aside for work is a mental exercise in itself, the equivalent of warming up before launching into a proper workout.

### 2. Don't stop talking

Ask your remote teams to be as contactable and present as possible, even if they're on the other side of the globe. Arrange a morning telephone catch-up (and an evening one too, if you can) and ensure they have access to some form of instant messaging. As a leader, you're going to need to push for more phone contact than you might feel naturally inclined towards – maintaining that human contact is crucial.

### 3. Dress to impress

Or at least just dress. It's amazing what wearing shoes does for your focus. Planting your soles firmly on the floor rather than cosily curling your toes into slippers makes you far more inclined to work. Arranging video calls via Hangouts, FaceTime and Skype is one sure way to ensure global teams actually get dressed – which is as much a positive mental exercise as properly preparing your workspace.

## How to attract and retain top young talent

After a long recruitment process, you've found the right candidate for that final vacancy in your team. It looks like the jigsaw is complete. They come in for their first day, it's all going well, and then you get an email from someone you recruited a year ago and whose work you've loved: they're resigning. Talent retention nightmare.

Getting the team together – talent attraction and talent recruitment – is just half the job for you as a leader. The other half is keeping it intact. Here are a few pointers that can help you avoid losing established talent even as you discover new stars:

### 1. Look after their wellbeing

I'm putting this first as it so often gets tagged on as an afterthought. What makes people leave their jobs? Unhappiness, quite often. Now, an employee might simply be unhappy with their role in ways that can't be fixed – time to move on – but what if they're unhappy in ways that you could have done something about? What if it's about managing stress and anxiety at work? Engage with team wellbeing and avoid losing people unnecessarily.

### 2. Show them the progression pathway

For strong talent retention, make sure your team members can see their next step up. It might be clear to you but not to them – and rather than ask, they might simply leave. Finding a new job – the "grass is greener" theory – can often seem the best option. If there's no obvious step up, be transparent about that. What else can you offer them in terms of expanding their experience and skillset? Skills development training is one obvious option.

### 3. Be as flexible as possible

Bend over backwards to accommodate flexible working requests. In the end, this is going to help your organisation. The world of business is changing at an incredibly rapid pace. If you build in a culture of flexibility into your workplace, it is less likely to snap under strain. Remote teams and virtual teams are the future.

## Why women in leadership should take that foreign secondment

The challenges for women in leadership are wide-ranging, but I must admit I'd not given this one much thought: secondments and placements abroad.

As [this article](#) points out, high-flying men are frequently offered the opportunity to stretch and further their careers with a stint at their firm's overseas office. The image of the male relocating his

family for the good of their future is so familiar as to be almost cliché.

But so *unfamiliar* as to be almost unheard-of is the opposite. How often do we hear of female executives taking up foreign posts and bring their families along for the ride. One's head might even jump to the question: Well, what would her husband think about that?

Women leaders simply must take these opportunities, for themselves and to change that culture. Nothing stretches an individual quite like being stretched in an unfamiliar land, with different languages and cultural norms. You grow as a person and you grow as a leader. And you set the scene for other female executives to do the same.

## How leaders can build team spirit in the age of remote working

"So if everybody can just say a little bit about themselves as we go round the table. Who wants to start?" I think we've all been in this scenario, be it in a meeting or at the start of a team-building exercise.

Team building is tricky and I'm conscious that many people would rather avoid it (or limit it to after-work drinks) but as [this fascinating article](#) explains, team building is actually a pretty potent force for improving team performance – so long as you use it right.

Behavioural science tells us that ritual (which is essentially what team building is) can be powerfully exclusive as well as inclusive and binding. So if you already have cliques – or even just certain groups with stronger bonds – within the team, then so-called "team-building" can be destructive to team performance, unless you take great care to make it inclusive.

But what the article really got me pondering was the place of team building rituals in remote working. It's pretty tricky to catch someone falling backwards when they're in a different country! Which just goes to shore up my conviction that leaders in the fourth industrial revolution – this new world of technology and virtual teams – need to have richer human qualities than ever before.

## How leaders can navigate the VUCA environment

You know things are getting serious when military acronyms enter the conversation.

Coined by the United States Army War College to describe the effects of the Cold War on the state of the world, VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

More and more it is being used in the context of business, as we face up to the challenges of – amongst other things – the giddy pace of change represented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Now, as acronyms go, VUCA is not the most reassuring. You could say it's alarmist – as if there's nothing we can do except race around pointing out how volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous everything is.

But there's plenty we can do! Here are my top tips to help you (apologies) bazooka that VUCA.

## Embrace unlearning as much as learning

Learning can no longer be done in one concerted effort, every now and then. Online algorithms don't sleep. Customers can scroll on by.

But as much as learning – learning with a ferocious hunger – you have to know what to *unlearn*. That can be hard. All that effort we've put in to get up to speed with this piece of software or that complicated protocol – surely it can't have been for nothing?

Yes, it can. Especially at the pace the world is developing now. There's a golden rule in the writing world: "[Kill your darlings](#)". That applies here, too.

## Change dynamically

This means actively looking for opportunities to change rather than waiting until you *have* to change – by then, it may be too late.

Don't underestimate this. It's not something that should be ignored, however easy it would be to do just that.

The thing is, changing dynamically is tiring. Picture yourself walking down a street. Now picture yourself sticking your head in at every shop, peering in at every window, darting down every last little alley for a quick snoop. Many of those will, of course, be blind alleys. But one will be the sneaky back route that nobody else has found yet – the back route that helps you avoid that enormous sinkhole that just opened up along the main road.

And there are more and more sinkholes.

## Rediscover your agility

Agile. We're at a difficult point with this term. The problem is that it has caught on. If left to our own devices, we humans go for the path of least resistance (most of the time). Being agile in business is a really difficult challenge that takes commitment, purposefulness and mental strength. So what happens is that we start looking at the vessel that holds all that difficulty – that vessel being the term 'agile working' – and we start paying lip service to it rather than really enacting it. We find ways to *look* agile – without being agile.

Put that spring back in your step.

## How leaders can ensure new starters' creative juices keep flowing

The onboarding process is often allowed to unfold without much regulation.

The attitude often seems to be that there's so much to do, so many systems and processes to get up to speed with, that an element of chaos is accepted without question. Give it a few weeks and the new recruit will – somehow or other – be properly adapted to their new work environment.

'How are you settling in? Lots to take on board, huh!' Some variation of this regularly gets thrown at newcomers to a business.

'There certainly is!' they giggle back nervously.

But this chaotic, muddle-through, every-new-starter-for-themselves approach might be doing serious damage. We need to disrupt that.

There's a good chance that your new recruit was brought on board for their capacity to think originally, to innovate and identify outside-the-box opportunities. (And if not, why not?!).

But all the spreadsheets and guideline documents being thrown at them in their first weeks can make them feel a straitjacket is being slowly but surely applied.

Here's how to avoid this pitfall –

### **Disrupt their onboarding**

Drag the new recruit away from their machine for a chat. Have big-picture conversations that tease them away from the dreary nitty-gritty (that of course they will be doing oh-so assiduously, hiding any dismay).

### **Set up cross-department intros**

Get your new recruit to meet people in the business who have no real involvement with the minutiae of the newbie's role. This reminds them that their presence here has more value than just the job spec's bullet points – not least a social one. They don't need to be 'on it' at every second of the day.

### **Revisit their interview**

This may sound counterintuitive – but they got the job, so this can only give them good vibes! Get hold of HR's notes and engage the new recruit in discussion of the same themes they covered so well in their interview. This will remind them of why they're here and that they've already achieved something big here – getting the job.

## **Why leaders should treat remote and flexible working with caution**

Remote and flexible working is becoming the norm. More and more, candidates expect to have the option of working from home or tailoring their working hours according to their personal commitments. As long as they get the work done, it's all good – that seems to be the way common wisdom is going at present.

And broadly speaking I agree. Broadly.

For instance, communication has to flow freely during the start-up stage. The questions come thick and fast and it's imperative to discuss them when they're asked. This needs more than a virtual water-cooler culture. This means an environment where we have constant access to each other – and our virtual water coolers are not quite up to the task just yet!

"Can I just run something by you?"

“Give me two seconds... Right, shoot.”

We cannot virtually recreate that kind of exchange – where we fit in with our colleagues’ momentum while maintaining our own – as well as we need to just yet. Yet it’s a type of exchange that is essential in the start-up phase.

For remote and flexible working to be a good idea, your organisation must know where it’s going. During the start-up stage, your teams may not even know what the work is or what their roles are supposed to be! Think of your company now as a very young child, asking Why? Why? Why? That questioning needs to be embraced – and it cannot be when we’re all in different places.

I mention trust. This is not about a lack of trust. In bringing people on board to your start-up, you’re already showing a lot of trust. As mentioned, to a large extent you’re trusting them to invent their own work. You’re trusting them to not choose the easy thing – which would result in stagnation – and instead to do the hard thing, resulting in growth.

And as described in [this Forbes article](#), “what worked yesterday barely works today and will likely fail tomorrow. Our systems and processes need to continually adapt to the reality of not only where we are currently, but where we’re going”.

You can’t fail fast when your team can’t dial in to meetings because of a patchy wi-fi connection or dodgy speaker. People will end up persevering with things they should be abandoning.

Eventually you can move to a place of clarity, with well-defined long-term goals and far fewer meetings – that is when remote and flexible working does not represent too much risk. This is when, to paraphrase [this Fast Company piece](#), your team members know what work needs to be done, and you trust them to get it done.

## **If we leaders offer flexible working, let’s make sure we’re true to our word**

I saw a plea on LinkedIn recently by one of my connections, asking that ‘If we don’t really mean it when we offer flexible working, please can we stop offering it at all?’.

It got me thinking about the relationship business currently has to flexible working. On the one hand, it feels like the notion is fully in residence across the majority of industries. Yet perhaps there’s an ‘Emperor’s new clothes’ aspect to it all. I mean, we’re all talking about flexible working, about the inevitability of it and the benefits of embracing it. We probably already offer it. But do we actually believe in what we’re saying? And – to echo my LinkedIn connection – if we do offer it, do we actually follow through with that promise?

If not, what’s stopping us? Is it that deep down we don’t think as much work gets done? Do we not trust our teams? Does a part of us feel the need to keep close (visual) tabs on them?

If any of the above rings true, then it’s time we took a hard look at ourselves as leaders. It could be that we’re not defining the work well enough. If the work is well defined, well weighted and fairly distributed, then we don’t need to keep tabs on our teams’ hours. Keeping tabs on their output should be what counts.

At the same time, let's be honest about what can happen. People *might* do shorter hours. They *might* go offline without forewarning. Dial-in meetings and hangouts can be glitchy.

But your role as a leader is not to enforce time restraints and dictate your team's schedule. The working day is not a vessel to be filled (and if your team does not fill it, they're not necessarily somehow shortchanging you). It's on you to define the team's goals so well that you don't need to fall back on crude checks of their use of time. You're not buying their time; you're buying their work. It's about output, not presenteeism.

## **How to make your leadership skills translate to virtual teams**

You're a great leader. You and your team click. You've reached the point where they instinctively understand what you want from a project's execution, while you have a handle on the little things you can do to motivate them. You look in each other's eyes and know you're on the same page.

But so much of this is about being physically present to one another. It's about body language and tone of voice. How do you replace the little asides, the knowing eye contact, the in-the-moment comment, the *do-you-have-a-moment?* moment, the *oh-I-nearly-forgot* reminder, the gee-up in response to tired-looking faces?

Quite simply, you can't. There are no like-for-like substitutes here.

As a leader of a remote workforce, you will not have access to lots of information and normal human dynamics that come naturally in the real world. And so much of what we understand about good leadership is predicated on working with real-life people. Here are my do's and don'ts for leading remote teams.

### **Don't try to force rapport**

We have to be honest with our remote teams. Let's acknowledge from the get-go that this situation isn't normal, that things may seem 'off'. Because they won't seem as 'off' as they would if you start trying to create that fabled virtual water cooler. To even try is inauthentic. It might bubble up organically, but don't force it. Bring this up from the beginning and invite a 'feeling things out' culture.

### **Messaging: clear, frequent and honest**

Remote teams cannot vent their frustrations as easily as real teams can. The upside of that, of course, is the absence of a griping culture. All you can do is make it as plain as possible that you invite feedback in both directions. In terms of feedback and messaging in general, remember that nuance and tone of voice is impossible to replicate in remote work. Instead, give clear and frequent messaging. Don't let the team think you've forgotten about them (and the quality of their work), even if it's a case of periodically saying 'I haven't forgotten about you'.

### **Give a thought to the introverts**

Remember that certain team members may have been attracted to remote working because they're introverts. They might not want that phone catch-up you're offering in a bid to mitigate against remoteness. Don't foist it on them.



## Don't disappear

At the same time, don't use the natural limitations of remote management as an excuse to disappear. Certain things have to be communicated as personally as possible, news of pay reviews being a major one. Always try to look into each other's (digital) eyes in such situations.

## Why leaders must take a central role in diversity and inclusion initiatives

You could say 2018 was a breakout year for diversity and inclusion initiatives in business. There was a raft of really fascinating diversity and inclusion articles being published towards the end of the year and [this Fortune piece](#) was one of my standouts.

I'd always thought of the battle for equal pay as being quite a simple proposition: we want fair remuneration for all. And we want it because everyone should receive the wages their work deserves, no matter their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability status.

But this quote from the article piqued my interest:

*One executive reminded fellow women in the room to look at their team and see if they're promoting equal pay. "You can fund power," she said. "Are you funding them and giving them the opportunities they deserve?"*

Funding power. Of course. Such a simple idea but so true. It's one prosaic but powerful way that diversity can beget diversity.

Another of the people quoted in the Fortune article makes a fabulous point:

*"It's super important that, at the executive level, you force the conversation," she said. "Wherever you sit in the chain, you fundamentally ask the question and not rely on minorities in the room to ask the question." And, she added, "You do need to stand up and say the things that need to be said. You have to be able to have a real conversation and listen to others even if you fundamentally disagree with where they come from."*

And someone else takes the point and ran with it:

*Monterroso, of Code2040, agreed. "We need to invest money and power and capital at the top to do work," she said, and not just use ERGs—employee resource groups—to do the heavy lifting.*

This is all very interesting because, if you think about it, it's asking leaders to take on a role they don't normally have: the starter of genuinely open, 'real' conversations. Leaders generally lead conversations – and end them – but when the issues at hand are diversity and inclusion, that's not an option (particularly if the leader is a white male).

As leaders, we must tread carefully around diversity and inclusion – but tread we must. Asking others to do it for us is a dereliction of duty.

## Why leaders must care about meaningfulness

I'm not too sure about the whole idea of supposing one generation has a distinct set of characteristics as compared to another one. It seems to be the fashionable thing to do, and it generates an awful lot of column inches – more, in my view, than the idea deserves.

Recently I came across this open letter from a Millennial to the world's employers: [Why Millennials Keep Dumping You: An Open Letter to Management](#).

Have a read of it. I'm not convinced that the things this correspondent wants are especially 'Millennial'. In fact, to bracket them as such does them a disservice. I think she is surfacing issues that apply to the entire workforce – particularly the issues around meaningfulness, which are incredibly stark.

Here's why I think meaningfulness is on people's minds (not just those of Millennials). The world is changing so quickly that what is true today may not be true tomorrow. There's so little security that our sense of there being things we can rely on has been enormously undermined – and that sense is a big part of meaningfulness. There is so much spin and there are so many people talking inauthentically and they are doing it in our faces via our social media apps.

So why would a Millennial – or indeed anyone – give their full, unwavering commitment to a role when that role may not be around for very long (either because the company fails or the role itself is modified by the company, responding to the world's speed of change)?

And why would they see much point giving themselves wholeheartedly to the business if they just don't particularly buy what you're selling? They know what other companies are like (Glassdoor) and they know what sort of messaging they are OK with, simply through having been saturated by messaging (it is all around them). Thanks to the modern voice of advertising, people are wise to the way that companies try to make friends with them now – and you are a company.

There's only so much you can do about this, but being level with people is one of them. So is making a real effort to be authentic and to recognise and call out spin when you see it at work in your business.

So many voices are vying to be the voice of reason. The voice of reason that makes people buy something. Bear that in mind when thinking about the messaging at your business. People have heard it all before. Or have they? Can you make it all add up?

You probably can't woo message-weary employees with your culture. 'Starting with why' won't guarantee that people stay. Ultimately they know that you're trying to make money out of them. If you want their buy-in, don't *expect* their buy-in. Be pleasantly surprised if you get it. And you might just get it by treating them as individuals, individuals with no great personal connection to your company and its 'culture'.

## Leading a diverse team and how to get the best of them

Like most things that are beneficial, leading a diverse team isn't always easy. Inherently and by definition, *you* are not 'diverse'. Individuals rarely embody diversity. That's one of the reasons that

workplaces ended up so lacking in diversity: we tend to employ people like us.

### **Your listening skills need to go into overdrive**

You simply cannot zone out when you have a diverse team, complacently assuming you probably more or less know the opinion your team member is conveying. The whole reason you've assembled this diverse team is because they're bringing a rich and challenging variety of viewpoints to the table. Zone out and you'll be completely lost – and then you'll lose them.

### **Give yourself time for things to sink in**

One of the reasons that diversity is dynamite for business is that people from different backgrounds are better aligned with the mindsets of customers and clients from those backgrounds. So your product or service has a better chance of landing. If you as a leader are from a totally different background, you might find it hard to get where some people on your diverse team are coming from – give yourself time to digest their points before making a judgement.

You need to read more widely

You just do. Read far and wide, left and right, gay and straight and everything in between, from the tabloids to the deepest recesses of the internet.

### **Check your instinctive responses (inherent bias)**

Mindfulness is often thrown around as something of a cure-all these days, but it really is invaluable as a tool for checking our responses. Imagine you're a celeb and your instinctive responses are the paparazzi – in this picture, mindfulness is your bouncer, pushing back the paparazzi, giving you space to move gracefully to where you want to be.

### **Consult an expert**

As I've already said, leading a diverse team doesn't come naturally – that's where diversity and inclusion officers can come in.

### **Expect bumps in the road and good disagreements**

You've asked for this! Remind yourself and your teams that disagreements are 100% OK, as long as civility never gets left behind.

### **Don't anticipate a clear path**

The benefits you'll reap from a diverse team are going to be diverse. And they may not happen in an ordered and timely fashion. You will reap what you've sown, but the harvest may not be like any you've known before! Be OK with it not 'working' straight away.

### **How to visualise leadership presence**

What with the connotations of aura, groundedness, stature, calmness and wisdom, the comparison between mature, majestic trees and people with impressive leadership presence is an obvious one.

Yet that doesn't make it invalid. Here's how I see it.

While the tree's canopy is as multifaceted as that of an oak in full summer leaf, the trunk has just two core parts.

The first is your clear, repeatedly evidenced will to move and adjust in ways that ensure you stay on course towards your own goals. You set short-term markers to keep things on track.

The second part of the trunk is your drive to go out of your way to facilitate others doing the same. You take sustenance from this.

Striving for your own goals and inspiring the people you come into contact with to do the same – these are the two core parts of leadership presence. And identifying 'just' two parts is helpful. Truly owning and embodying any leadership quality is not easy, so two are quite enough as principal targets. Focus deeply, mindfully and concertededly. These are lifelong projects.

They're a little yin and yang, too. You can't be overweening in your ambition if you care this much about others. And you cannot be an ineffectual people-pleaser if you care this much about your own progression and development.

What about the leaves in the canopy? They are many: the recognition that leadership presence is not loud and brash but nor is it meek; cherishing your uniqueness as you would a beautiful fruit; seeking the inspirational and idiosyncratic in people; aversion to negative talk and negative talkers.

But start with the trunk: strive at all times to achieve your own goals and to help others do the same. This makes you a leader fit for any company, not just a senior manager suited to one.

## **What leaders can do when collaboration fails**

Day in, day out, as the Prime Minister struggles so publicly to bring Brexit to an acceptable conclusion, we see the effects of failed collaboration. Of course, Brexit is a colossal undertaking and one, some would argue, that no team could successfully have managed. The collaboration projects you embark on in your business should not be unassailable, yet they might still fail to spark. Here are a few suggestions for what to do when collaboration goes wrong.

### **Check that the lines of communication are open and honest**

If you have teams working together who do not know each other well, there may well be a lack of trust. Yet that lack of familiarity with each other might also mean that team members don't feel able to speak honestly about each other. This is a difficult double bind: here your role as leader becomes one of moderator.

### **Assess the tools of collaboration**

There are so many tools of efficiency and collaboration available now, yet none of them do everything you need for a project. Even so, avoid the temptation to throw tool after tool at the problem. The more platforms collaborators are working on, the more blurred the messaging. Finalise the tools of collaboration at the outset.

## Focus on diversity

If collaboration is not having the desired commercial effects, consider the possibility that the collaborative dynamics may be insufficiently diverse. Groupthink is poison to business success.

## Differentiate between collaboration and competition

Are stakeholders buying into the end goal of this collaboration or looking out for themselves? When people work with relative strangers on a project, there are two – essentially social – dangers to look out for: caring less about the other people ('I'll probably never work with them again') and showing off.

## Cut out the oversharing

Just because these departments or individuals aren't used to working together does not mean that everyone should be copied in on every email. Stakeholders and their roles – what they can offer and what they need from others – should be clearly defined at the outset.

## Scrutinise the meetings schedule

Sometimes our knee jerk reaction to any knotty issue is to call a meeting. But a meeting won't work out that knot unless the meeting is set up right. Meeting fatigue is a powerful drain on productivity.

## Make collaboration a goal in itself

Not everyone is a natural collaborator. Many of us prefer to go it alone; a few will **passive-aggressively refuse collaboration**. Get round this by making clear that you view collaboration as a goal in itself.



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