

LEADERSHIP MATTERS – Issue 7

THE BEST ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED

Professor Steve Smith is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter. He succeeded Sir Geoffrey Holland in October 2002, having previously been Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) and Professor of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Professor Smith has a BSc in Politics and International Studies, an MSc in International Studies and a PhD in International Relations, all from Southampton University. During his 29-year academic career he has contributed to, or written, 13 books, nearly 100 academic papers and has given over 150 academic presentations in 22 countries.

Professor Smith's career has included positions as Director of the Centre for Public Choice Studies at the University of East Anglia and Head of the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth. In 2001 he became only the second UK academic to be elected President of the International Studies Association in the USA. He was also the recipient of the Susan Strange Award of the International Studies Association in 1999 for the person who has most challenged the received wisdom in the profession.

“I went on a management training course once where we had to imagine we were in a lunar capsule with only 3 minutes of air left. We had to decide which of the items in the capsule we would jettison to save ourselves. I can't remember why getting rid of things would save us, but it seemed to make sense at the time. However, being academics, we couldn't agree within the 3 minutes, and so we all perished! The point of the exercise, of course, was not to decide which were the three most important items, but to underline the importance of **being able to make joint decisions**.

I was also very much influenced by hearing about the concept of 'path dependency' which describes the tendency of large organisations to keep on treading the same path – unless someone changes something. It really changed the way I thought about leadership and how it was the leader's responsibility to take the organisation in new directions, not just to improve what it already does. The University's Chair of Council, Russel Seal, a former joint Managing Director of BP, has exactly the same view, although he comes from a very different background. He is very fond of the phrase: **'If you do what you've always done, then you get what you've always got'**

The other phrase I remember is: **'You must not will the end without willing the means.'** In other words, a leader has to create a vision of where he/she wants the organisation to get to. But he/she also has to put in place the mechanisms to get there”.

Shaun Galloway is the Financial Director of Ginsters. He is a business administration graduate and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. He has been with Ginsters for 12 years, and has been Financial Director since 1997. He has been a member of the University of Exeter Business Forum for several years.

“It can be a lonely position at the top of an organisation. I discovered this when I became a Financial Director for the first time. I was fortunate to have worked with my predecessor for several years and succeed him in the role.

He had always been an extremely positive person. I assumed this energy radiated from the boardroom and all he was doing was reflecting the positivity of the other directors.

How wrong I was! The boardroom was nothing like that. It occurred to me my boss had radiated all that positivity on his own in order to achieve his objectives. I quickly had to reflect, adapt and encompass some of those skills and behaviour into my own style.

What I have learned about good leadership boils down to two things: **Clarity and Enthusiasm**. People want to know exactly what is expected of them and encouraged that it is the right thing to do and that they can achieve it.

Easy to say...bit harder to do! Knowing what you want and positively believing you can get there, is half the battle”.

Deborah Williams is a training consultant with her own management and leadership business, *Aspire2Develop*. A former naval officer, she recalls a valuable piece of advice from her officer training days.

“As a young, newly promoted naval officer, it is too easy to imagine that you can walk on water! Full of aspirations and enthusiasm, you are keen to make a good impression. Too often, this new status and rank can be confused with believing you always have to be right, know all the answers and be the one in control. However, before I left training an instructor gently told me one day: **‘always respect the knowledge and experience of your team’**.”

It is a management and leadership lesson that I have never forgotten. You may be new, but it is likely the team has previously seen it, done it or know the answer. Ultimately, they will respect you more if you are also prepared to ask, watch, listen and learn. There is nothing to fear from upward leadership.”

MRS GILLIAN SHIRAZI, LVO - Secretary General of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association (also known as The International Award Association)

Gillian Shirazi joined the Award in 1982 as Overseas Executive in the then Overseas Department of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award UK. She became International Operations Officer in 1985, Assistant Secretary General (Operations and Training) in 1988, was appointed Deputy Secretary General in 1998, and Secretary General in 2005.

The Association links together the National Award Authorities (NAAs) and Independent Operators (IOs), from 112 countries, which run the Programme, based upon the structure and concepts of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which originated in the United Kingdom in 1956. These Programmes often operate under different titles - for example, The President's Award (Trinidad & Tobago), The National Youth Achievement Award (Singapore) and The El Hassan Youth Award (Jordan).

Her main responsibilities include providing advice to NAAs and IOs on the operation of the Award and the training of adult volunteers; overseeing the work of the International Secretariat head-quarters and Regional staff; organising the Association's international meetings and conferences, liaising with external agencies and assisting with the establishment of the Award in new countries. Her work has taken her to 50 countries worldwide in the last 20 years.

Gillian Shirazi was born and grew up in the West of Scotland and has a degree in Statistics from the University of St Andrews. She achieved her Gold Award in 1978 through the Girl Guide Association in the UK, having already achieved the Bronze and Silver Awards. Her interests include local community work through the National Association of Ladies Circles; continued involvement with Guides as a unit leader and acting as the Independent Coordinator for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Harpenden, where she lives. She is married to Shahab Shirazi, an Optometrist.

In 2002, she was presented with The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association's International Certificate of Recognition, the Association's highest honour. She was made a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order (LVO) in the New Year's Honours List in January 2003 for services to The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association.

"When I was 17, my father taught me to drive. That was a challenging leadership situation for both of us! I remember one thing in particular which he drummed into me as we negotiated the quiet and not-so-quiet roads of my home town of Kirkintollock, and that was to **never presume what another driver was going to do, or assume you know what they are thinking."**

This phrase has stuck with me ever since, and I find time and again that if I do presume, I am invariably wrong.

I think it is important to try to understand what motivates people I am working with, and to take their point of view into account when I make a decision. I try never to presume that they feel the same as me, and I like to look at the

impact of the decision from all sides. This understanding may not affect my decision, but it does influence how I communicate it”

Barry Warburton is Head of External Affairs at EEF Western. He is the Leadership and Management Champion for the SWESA. Over many years he has been a driver of change within companies to ensure that they are able to address the issues of working in the new global economy. His career has included Personal Development for undergraduates at a leading University where he ensured their abilities were enhanced to effect a smooth progression into employment. He is currently project managing the £4.2 million South West RDA funded Advanced Engineering Skills Project.

“Out of the many tips I have had in my life, one of the most influential was a comment made to me during one of my innumerable personal appraisal sessions throughout my varied career. It was said to me that **“if you want to drive your organisation forward through change and continuous improvement, as the driver, you must always look over your shoulder to ensure your passengers are still with you”**

What is the point of driving through change if the culture or the team do not understand, or are unwilling to move at your speed? This lesson was brought home very recently when I assumed that a customer was moving towards the changes we had discussed, when in truth he could not do so because he needed support with his own leadership and management skills in order to implement it”

Roger Niven is a Fellow of the Centre for Leadership Studies in the University of Exeter. After working in the airline industry he became a strategy consultant based in the USA and then Europe. Now in the third phase of his career he works in management development as a consultant, facilitator or coach. His particular interest is in the translation of strategic intent into action, and in the role of a leader as a steward of a very scarce resource – people.

“The best advice I ever had was on the tarmac of Dum Dum airport in Kalikat in the midst of the relief operation after a cyclone had hit the then East Pakistan; killing perhaps half a million people. With the entire Ganges delta flooded it was simply not known how many people were dead, dying, or in need of help, but urgent aid was needed.

The advice was in the form of a request. As a station officer I was resplendent with three gold rings and, as the duty officer for the only European airline operating at the time, was now responsible for the ground operations of many other airlines as they diverted flights to bring in emergency aid.

“Please sir, please walk around but do not get involved, this situation is far too difficult”. This was said very politely and courteously by a Bengali

supervisor, and although the “for you” was left unsaid the implication was clear. I had well trained and experienced staff, working to their limits. They cared deeply about what they were doing. The last thing they wanted was me to start confusing them by the issue of additional orders.

They did want to see me, they valued my presence, and if they were to need anything they would ask. Indeed they did. I was frequently asked to deal with other stakeholders such as the airport management, customs, charity representatives, consular officials; and to answer many of the telephone calls from Europe, and senior management in Delhi. My role was to stop them interfering as well.

The performance of the staff was outstanding. They worked around the clock for four or five days until relief staff from Delhi and Mumbai arrived, and we handled more flights in that period than we normally saw in a year.

I have remembered this lesson many times in my own career and when working with other managers in operational situations as varied as healthcare, retailing and financial services. The overwhelming desire for most of us is to exercise control in a crisis. Sometimes this is not what the followers want, or need. They need space, reassurance, support and occasionally clear counsel. When I left Calcutta I was paid a great compliment by the same supervisor; at least I think it was a compliment -“**Roger, sir, thank you for not trying to be John Wayne**”. It was the only time he ever used my first name”

Angela Wright, MBE - Managing Director, Crealy Great Adventure Parks has operated a variety of businesses for over 20 years and began a feasibility study into the opening of a tourist attraction at the present site of Devon’s Crealy Great Adventure Park near Exeter in the mid 1980s. Work began in earnest in 1988, with the Park opening for business in April 1989. The target of 40,000 visitors for Year 1 was achieved. Visitor numbers are now up to 500,000 per annum.

Crealy Great Adventure Parks are a family-run business. Maximum Fun Ltd also reflects the business’ mission statement. As Managing Director, Angela is involved in sales, marketing, operations, accounts and strategy. Staff are recognised as the most important asset of Crealy Great Adventure Parks, as staff alone can make or break a guest’s experience. Customer delight is the aim at Crealy - which has contributed to the Park being the only leisure/tourism business to win the prestigious Devon and Cornwall Business Challenge Award. Other awards have included South West Attraction of the Year, from the English Tourism Council, International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Awards for Best Brochure, Best Website, runner-up Souvenir and Orientation Program Awards, and also a “Parents at Work” Best Boss Award.

In 2003, Angela was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for “services to tourism” and also received South West Tourism’s Chairman’s Award for “contributions to tourism”.

Angela serves on the Management Committee of the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions and the Devon Association of Tourist Attractions. Angela represented BALPPA when she presented questions to the First European Tourism Forum in Brussels. Angela is also a member of IAAPA Communications Committee. She is also working with a South African Charitable Trust, 'Roundabout Outdoors', who are installing roundabouts, which pump clean water from boreholes across Africa. Angela has brought this project to the attention of IAAPA and BALPPA and is in the process of installing roundabouts in theme parks and attractions in the developed world. Angela is also a member of South West Tourism, East Devon Tourism, Cornwall Association of Tourist Attractions, Newquay Attractions Trail, the Country Land Association and the Institute of Directors.

“The best advice I have ever had was from my father, Roy Down, which I turn to regularly and hear our staff quoting too. It is simply that, **“You must have good people around you, whom you are pleased to see in the morning”**

Ideally, I look for people who know more than I do, and who challenge my opinions – because if we both always agree, then one of us is redundant! Plus, I love working with young people – and people of a young outlook – because of the energy, enthusiasm and desire for fast progress.”

***Alan Hooper** is the Founder of CLS and a current Fellow. He recalls a key moment when he was trying to encourage empowerment within a large organisation in the Royal Marines, without much success.*

“I had been in post for about six months and was chairing a routine meeting. When I asked if there were any questions at the end of our discussions, a new member of the team asked a particular question which I appreciated immediately was fundamental to our work. The only problem was that it indicated that I had been promoting the wrong policy!

Instead of falling into the trap of fobbing it off, I met his query face on and said: **“John has raised a good point – and I have been leading us in the wrong direction. Let’s pick up his idea and see where it leads us.”**

It was as though I had opened the flood gates. Ideas started to sprout up from all over the organisation and soon we were awash with initiatives! I learnt subsequently that people had held back before because they were not sure they could trust me – too many previous bosses had ‘stolen’ their ideas. My public admission of my mistake had encouraged them to see whether I was as good as my word. Fortunately, I was!”

*When not adjusting to life in the Scottish Highlands where she moved to in November 05, **Kate McKinley** runs Reach, a consultancy helping individuals, teams and organisations communicate effectively. Kate hopes she does likewise in sharing this piece of advice she encountered last year.*

“Life can be messy. And no matter how hard I try to pin, tuck and tidy, it still seems to seep out over the edges.

This can be frustrating and, as I’m starting to discover, a completely misplaced use of my energy and efforts.

I came across a poem last year by Rainer Maria Rilke. In it she suggests to us **‘to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything.’**

I like that. It has, for me, begun ease away the driving need for certainty. Many of us have founded our businesses on this kind of thinking. We retain a desire to fix, change and control; like a machine we can tinker with.

So it’s starting to feel like something of a relief to relinquish some old certainties and tightly held opinions and let life surprise me, which, of course, it does – often”