

CHAPTER 21

LEADERSHIP

Dad was my role model and my leader. I am sure every child, when they are growing up, looks to their father and their mother and they make a huge impression as leaders. Obviously, my dad made a massive impression. While I talk about leadership, I want to take a moment to look at how we lead in a challenging economy, and in particular in the current circumstances of a pandemic. There are some leadership qualities that are especially relevant for our readers on the launch date of 20 August 2020, so that is reflected in these ideas.

Dad used to say that every organisation, from the smallest to the largest, needs a leader. Organisations have their committees and their structures but, overall, every organisation, business or country needs strong and able leadership. Dad said the morale of an organisation is not a bottom-up exercise, but a top-down exercise. And he always stressed that the leader will always be just one person. He was clear on that.

If we look back through history, starting with Mahatma Gandhi and thinking about the great Prime Ministers, including Winston Churchill, Dad said there is only ever one leader. He said this lesson is based on the laws of nature. The true goal of all leaders is to get others to think of them as the leader, but the goal of the exceptional leader is to get people to think highly of themselves. That is the only type of leader that will endure, especially in the new world post-pandemic.

Take a moment and think of someone you can follow. I continue to follow Dad and learn from his ideas each day. We need to understand that the smallest and the largest companies, governments and institutions will always find that when they are in trouble they go to this one person. Sometimes there is no one person who is held out as the sole leader, perhaps there is a board of directors, but still thousands of shareholders will tend to look to one person for leadership, particularly in times of crisis. Wherever you find a successful going concern, there is always a strong leader. This is the most valuable person in society. In industry, they make the wheels turn and the entire economy work. This is the person who has been responsible for the growth of nations, where Mahatma Gandhi comes to mind.

Leaders are the employers of millions, they are the dreamers, the planners and the do-ers. A story springs to mind that is especially relevant during the pandemic, as the world is going into a recession. It is about a man who was always able to get a job, who could talk to people and provide solutions, and who could always help people. He analysed businesses, talked to other people in the same line, listened to problems, heard what was going wrong, talked for hours and studied, and then he began to think of ways and means by which businesses

might be improved. When he had done all his research, he went to the CEO or the Board and he said he knew how the business could be greatly improved. Then he would just send a quite simple line – that is all he sent. He always had lots of work.

So, building on this concept of a problem-solution continuum now, which I am spending a lot of time on, it is all about solving problems with positive mental attitude and expressing a willingness to pitch in and help when things are difficult.

What this man did first of all, was specialise. He had selected one line and decided that was where his future would be. Dad said to me many times, ‘Do not be Jack of all trades and a master of none.’ The best way to develop security that lasts a lifetime is to become outstanding in one particular line; be good at what you do.

People who knew what they were doing and where they were going sailed through the Great Depression and other downturns just as a large ship sails through a storm. It may not have been as comfortable as it could have been, but at least the crossing was a success. At least they did not drown; thousands of businesses actually prospered. But thousands also failed because they did not have a positive mindset and the right leader.

Dad always said that with the right leadership you can sail through any challenge. This is the time that true leaders are going to emerge, because the clock has been reset. In the Great Depression, organisations reset the clock, and many became successful. It was a great time for new leaders to emerge.

Regardless of economic ups and downs, industry will not shut down completely. As long as you are in the top 10% of people providing the service that you provide, you will be fine. ‘The people who suffer are the people who are not good at their jobs,’ Dad said. The men and women who become truly outstanding at what they do have the world in their palm. The person of confidence, with peace of mind, is the person who is quietly aware of their ability, be it a dealmaker, home maker, or country maker. Everybody knows they are capable because they carry great stature with them.

Dad told me, ‘Son, ask yourself if you are one of them. If not, start working on it right here, right now. Leadership has two important components. One is to do with the business or industry – you need to understand the business you are in. The second is the people you deal with, and that is the most important one.’

Dad said these things, and Clay talked about similar concepts in his book *How Will You Measure Your Life*, and I came to understand you need to know your job, your sector and everything about it, because knowledge is power. But you have also got to understand how to work with people. Leaders get work done through people. Teamwork is essential, up and down the line.

Dad never believed in line management. Even in the early 1980s I remember he used to say, we are not managing a line, we are managing people. Human relations are likely to be strained when people are asked to do things they have not planned themselves or they may not be keen to do. Dad said, ‘Mahan (son), everyone is in a leadership role. You get to lead only when you take responsibility.’

Dad also said a leader must be a strong originator. That person must be able to originate a constructive idea, concentrate on that idea, reject any ideas that others might present, and pursue their journey to a goal. ‘For that,’ he said, ‘you need guts. You need the ability to believe in and follow your instincts.’ That is what sometimes causes leaders to appear arrogant or cold-blooded, but the true leader knows where they are going and why they are going there and, as long as they work with the laws of nature, nothing will stop them.

Most people find this difficult to do, because our conscious mind is bombarded with lots of information and there are more experienced people who have done things before and are perceived to have the wisdom of the world. Forget it. Dad said that if you want to be a true leader, work within yourself. You need highly evolved will and the ability to concentrate on one thing. It is an intellectual factor that you can develop at any age. Age is not relevant, though there is a huge amount of research showing that once you are over 40, you become better at it because of experience. But age is not relevant – anybody can put up his hand and become a leader today.

Even when an individual has developed expertise in an area, that alone will not create a good leader. Dad said a good leader must also be a good follower. I have studied so many leadership books, theories and models; those are valuable, but what we are talking about here is the human side of leadership. Strong leaders have a deep appreciation for the creative ability of others. They are very much aware of how to work with other people’s minds. ‘It is, at the end of the day,’ Dad said, ‘a mind game. If you create the greatest minds and if you become a great mind, you can achieve anything.’

The truly effective leader, especially in the post-pandemic world, will know when to be an originator. It has been said many times that we can accomplish almost anything in our life if we do not care who gets the credit. ‘Please do not go for individual credit,’ Dad said, ‘just lead, even if you are not perceived to be the leader or not given the job to be the leader. People do not get promotions, they promote themselves.’

The effective leader clearly understands how to develop what is sometimes referred to as the composite personality. Dad said that to build a composite personality it is necessary to understand how human nature works and how the laws of nature work. We have talked about the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, the body, action, reaction, the laws of nature; you need an understanding of how to work with others and how to create a composite relationship. This is something where you need to understand the concept of conductive reasoning, where you create an idea with lots of thought and you bring ideas into your subconscious mind, leading to action. An understanding of this is so important – Dad said you need to understand how this machine works. Stephen R. Covey’s work in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* captures these ideas as well.

The other thing that I have studied, and Carnegie mentioned it many times, is that when things go wrong, leaders need to make a decision. Dad said when you get up in the morning, if you are part of a team, just make sure you are part of the crew and not part of the cargo. He said the only people that will be let go are those that the leadership believes are part of the cargo. If the leader cannot see what you do and they think you are part of the cargo because they are ignorant, somebody else will snap you up and you will do well.

Let us be frank, who gets laid off in an economic slump? Obviously, the cargo. It is the same with any organisation. A corporation's main purpose is to remain in business forever. As long as it remains in business, it can provide a service. Protect those who are making a difference to the organisation and the customers. It is the duty of management, and the leader who leads the company, to protect the firm and the people who depend on it, just as it is the captain's duty to do everything in their power to keep the ship sailing.

All a person needs to do is make certain they are a vital part of their business or organisation. Nobody, especially the captain, likes to see the cargo thrown over the side, but if it helps to save the ship, there is nothing else that can be done. Dad said just go and do it; you are doing the right thing for the organisation. Always think about the customers, think about the value and the purpose, then you will make the right decision. You are making the decision not because you want to, but because you need to. If someone has made themselves the cargo, it is not your mistake. That is why people are laid off. It has nothing to do with asset management or labour relations, that is not the point. It is doing the best for everyone, since once smooth sailing has again been reached, additional employment can return when it is needed. So, each of us must decide whether we want to be part of the cargo or a member of the crew. This has really made a huge impact on my thinking.

Each of us can become such a leader in our own area of activity. It is not difficult. The leader-follower is effectively a mind game and if you master it, you can absolutely become successful. Dad said there are only a few ways for an individual to connect with another

individual. If you think about history, Mahatma Gandhi did it in one way, Napoleon Bonaparte did it in another, and dictators in various parts of the world did it differently again. But you can only achieve followers through fascination with a leader, agreement, or by shock.

The effective leader always works on agreement and they want it to be the follower's decision. An individual working with this knowledge will have no need to manipulate a person. Dad talked about manipulation; in fact, this is exactly how manipulation occurs. What the manipulator does not understand is that they are part of an orderly nature and subject to laws, so they reap what they sow. The manipulator never really wins, however much it may appear that they do. The people that take peace and honesty as their passions and work with agreement become the true leaders, just like Mahatma Gandhi.

Dad used to say that if you take a gun and end a life, that same gun will kill you. If you take a knife and think you are going to get freedom, that same knife will kill you. Action, reaction. But if you take the truth and take a nation towards development, that same truth will save you.

‘Every day,’ Dad said, ‘you form a composite with another personality, even though you may not be aware of that taking place. Everyone who generates an idea creates a composite personality with another person, who will become receptive to that person's suggestions.’ Dad said that there are simple ways you need to operate. ‘You should always operate with a certain amount of ethics,’ he said. Ask questions and listen to answers. Be direct, honest, sincere and friendly.

‘Do not ignore suggestions,’ he said, ‘because that is unfair.’ Sometimes I find it challenging when I come up with an idea and

somebody shoots me down without even taking it into consideration. But instead of becoming frustrated, I have decided it is their ignorance. I need to work on myself and increase the self-esteem of others, because by doing that perhaps I can better put across my idea.

‘Be calm,’ Dad said, ‘and be collected. And always call people by their name, because it makes a big difference,’ He used to tell me. I see that. Even our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, when facing difficult questions, always takes the time to call people by their first name.

Dad also always advised me to develop my ability to give suggestions that others will accept, and I am practising this. You must know in advance what suggestion you will give. He said, ‘Have a clear and concise suggestion in your mind and communicate your ideas verbally, in writing and in gesture. Think about your tone of voice. A suggestion must be complete in its entirety, be precise and be on message.’

‘You have also got to become a kind of sponge,’ Dad said, ‘for information that will help you on your way. This is where learning comes in.’ He always learned because he always read.

‘You do not have to waste years making the same mistakes,’ he said, ‘let others make some. You will be surprised at how quickly you will reach your goal, but do not be impatient.’ I was always impatient, and I think Mum mentioned in her book that Dad was always saying, ‘Mahan, be patient.’ As a child I was impatient to get things done quickly. Now, I get things done quickly, but I am practising being patient. I am impatient to get things done and that is not a bad thing.

Know and have faith that what should come to you will come to you at the right time. Dad always believed he would get what he wanted.

‘The laws will always do that for you,’ he said. ‘And above all, if you should forget everything else,’ he said, ‘remember that everything about you, everything you will ever have, experience, or know, operates as a result of law. The law that is true and unshakeable, the law of the stars and the suns of the world, this is the law of nature that we need to understand. As humans, we need a deep understanding of the natural laws and we need to learn the essence of a higher strength, our internal strength. Learn that everything in nature goes by law, not by luck.’

That took me a really long time to understand, but Dad always completely believed in that. When I was a child I would lose at cricket and come home devastated. Dad said would say, ‘Everything for good.’ But I just could not understand that back then.

The same thing happened throughout my life until 2006. Dad said that however hard and bad a problem is, the return will be bigger. So, as I now reflect on that in this final chapter, and back to 2006 when I lost him in an accident, at the time that was the greatest tragedy I had experienced in my life. I was devastated, I was shattered; I thought the whole world could not go on. But today, after many years, his departure has actually taught me so many lessons.

None of us are here forever. I am not here with my girls forever. But I am sharing with them some of the ideas that Dad shared with me. I do not have a book in which I can read his ideas because he did not write one, but I am fortunate that I have a great sense of gratitude and I am able to bring this book into the world as I turn 50.

I am also grateful that I bring this to the world as the world needs

it, in the midst of a pandemic. We do not know how this is going to unfold, but everyone is able to create their own economy. You can look at the news and you can look at the negatives, but I have learned from Dad, and others, that if someone comes from a negative point of view, it is best not to listen. I hear, it goes in one ear and out of the other, and then at the first available opportunity, I change the topic.

I do not flatter them, but I change the topic into a positive and talk about them in a positive way. Humans will always enjoy hearing positivity about themselves. It is not flattery, because you do not want to be in a negative space. But some people are obviously completely entrenched in negativity, so the best thing to do is not to have conversations of that sort. I have friends who, when you talk about something positive, will go onto something negative in the next five seconds. They can drag you down. But now I have learned not to communicate with them, because I cannot do anything else for them.

Look about you now, take stock of your present results and your situation, because it is nothing more or less than the results of your past actions. Are you happy? Is it what you want? When you answer these questions, you know what you must do today, tomorrow, and the next day. And in that action, rest in the calm, serene and peaceful life that will come to your palm. Then, you will reach what you want to achieve, and you will harvest what you have sown.

Dad went to the same British school in Sri Lanka that I went to, the Methodist Central College established by a missionary, Reverend William Ault, in 1814, which was the first British-established school in Sri Lanka. In 1988, when I was 18 and studying for my A-levels, we

celebrated the school's 175th anniversary. I was a proud Senior Prefect and I wrote an article in Tamil about leadership. I started that article with the words, 'If you are not going to change when you are five, you are not going to change when you are 50.' Today, 30 years after leaving that school, I think I humbly disagree with that opening statement.

My Dad was in the Old Boys' Association of the school and wrote his own article as part of those celebrations. He talked about how wonderful the Methodist missionary values were and how they had helped him. We also received a visit from the Reverend James Cartman, Principal of the school from 1938 to 1942. I had the huge privilege of meeting Rev Cartman, who was given an OBE for Education because of the work he did on the east coast of Sri Lanka.

It was my ignorance, when I was 18, to make that statement about change. I can now humbly say, 'Young Pankajan, I'm sorry, you were wrong. You can change when you are 50 or 60, as long as you are willing to change and willing to understand the laws of nature.' Dad said that and I did not appreciate it then, but I do now.

This is *The Power of Learning from DAD*.