



Following on from our research-based article on the Four X-factors of an Exceptional Leader, we shall be focusing on each trait in more detail over the coming months. In part one of the series, our European Chairman, Pat Chapman-Pincher, looks at the trait: “They play well on teams, they don’t lead”.

FOR CEOs – THERE’S A REALLY IMPORTANT TEAM THAT YOU DON’T LEAD

I LOVE AN OBSERVATION BY Manfred Kets de Vries, Professor of Leadership Development at INSEAD, who said: “When we talk about leaders, we too often think about an individual with specific abilities. But no one can do everything. Leadership is a team sport.”

When we think about great leaders, we still tend to think about the individual. The hero general or hero CEO leading their troops into battle. It’s a great Shakespearian view of leadership. It’s a view that has driven too many leaders to see themselves as the only person who can take the company forward. This can often lead to a combination of hopeless over-optimism on results combined with bad and often bullying behaviour. It ends with a stressed and surprised CEO, fired because they have failed.

As my colleagues Adam Bryant, David Reimer and Harry Feuerstein write in their article in Strategy + Business magazine, “The Four X-factors of Exceptional Leaders”, the best leaders are team players. Microsoft’s Satya Nadella says that he focused most in the early stages on maximising the effectiveness of his leadership team. That’s vital, because if you don’t have an effective team, then you will burn out quickly as a command-and-control leader. You need to make sure that your team is operating effectively and that means building on each other’s strengths and communicating honestly and openly.

So, you have your own team, you have put great effort into developing it and it’s running like clockwork. Job done? No. To be a great leader you don’t just have your own team that you concentrate on. However senior you are, you are always part of someone else’s team. If you don’t play well on those teams, you will only ever be half a great leader. You may

be part of a divisional peer group, you may be part of an industry group. Great leaders think really hard about the teams they are in and roles that they play in those teams. They try to maximise every team because every team is integral to their success. They look for areas where they can add value and are careful about standing back if they cannot. They coach and train other team members. If they are senior to some of the people on the team then they try very hard not to dominate.

For newly appointed CEOs, it often comes as something of a shock to find that, having worked your way to the top of the company, you are now part of another team – the Board. Playing well on that team can be the difference

“However senior you are, you are always part of someone else’s team”

between success and failure for any CEO. I’ve heard Chairmen wave farewell to a CEO with the epitaph, “not really a team player”. You are an important member of the Board, but you are not its leader; that is the Chairman’s role – and you forget that at your peril. Some of its most important members are non-executives who do not even work in your company. You have to build good relationships with your Chairman and the NED’s who sit on your board. You don’t control this team, you may see some of them only once a month, but they are the people who have the power to appoint you and remove you if they are unhappy. At the end of Board meetings, the governance process requires that they discuss your performance after you have left the room. They sign off your company strategy, they sign off your salary. You

need to spend almost as much time building relationships with this team as you do with the team that reports to you. To do this you need to behave as you do with your own team, spend time with them, listen, be humble, over-communicate. Believe that you can learn from them.

Leadership is a team sport. Great leaders understand both their own strengths and weaknesses and those of the people who work for them and with them. They build complementary teams and work within those teams continuously to make them better.

I leave the last word to Andrew Carnegie: “No man (or woman) will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself or get all the credit for doing it.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...



PAT CHAPMAN-PINCHER is one of the most successful women in the global communications industry. In a career spanning more than 40 years she has been responsible for creating and growing global companies in the telecoms and internet sector. She has participated in start-ups of small technology companies and has board level experience in both large and small organisations.

Pat became a mentor because she believes that being a CEO is one of the most interesting and exciting, but also one of the loneliest jobs in the world. However, she believes that a partnership with a good mentor can transform the experience.