

CRITICAL AND UPCOMING ISSUES IN LEADERSHIP

Style. A word usually associated with the catwalk, with interior design, with beauty even but rarely with leadership. But what if the stepping stone between the two were 'design'. Consider these two statements; "*I believe that design is problem solving with grace and foresight*"^[1] and "*the skills that designers develop often without realising, in analysing problems, use lateral thinking to develop smart solutions*"^[2].

Now substitute the word, "leadership" for "design" in the first and "leaders" for "designers" in the second and in my opinion you've struck upon the crux of the task facing today's leaders. Elegant and purposeful designers employ design thinking and my proposition is that we should allow the cultivation of a greater depth of leadership thinking. Leading infused with intelligence and wisdom.

So what surrounding waters might we be casting these new thinkers into? Politically we are fast approaching (or have already entered into) a time of stasis, when the parties turn their attention not to the here and the now but the there and then of May 2015. The inherent danger for the leaders of our communities, our organisations and our society is that they become enveloped by this inertia.

"Tyrants conduct monologues above a million solitudes." – Albert Camus

With the seductive pull of 'fixing' problems with 'strong', authoritarian leadership tugging at their heels, current leaders could easily encounter solitudes staring back at them. From a leaders perspective it may be too tempting to make demands for a multitude of action, unaware that you were engaging in Camus' tyrannical bear-trap. Now is no time for these hero leaders, hewn from the thin, garish cloth of short-termism.

"We make the gestures commanded by existence for many reasons, the first of which is habit." – Montaigne

If we compel our leaders to think differently, then by extension we will be asking them to act differently too. My provocation to them is – how will you wake from the sleep of habit?

That awakening may well encompass a greater sense of acuity towards the pressures of leadership. At one of my favourite coffee bars it tells you, in screamingly large lettered wall-paper, "*the pressure is good for you*". That may be true for carefully selected, perfectly roasted and lovingly prepared coffee beans but does it apply to leaders too? I believe it does and that developing a bold, personal strategy for flourishing under the pressure is a necessity.

"If a listener is present there is even noise in a silent room."^[3]

With this in mind, a further challenge for the leaders of today is how to become wonderful listeners – by which I mean what they choose to pay attention to. Wonderfully attentive listeners are able to nurture and articulate their flourishing strategies, with powerful results.

No matter what else changes, leaders will still require the requisite skills to navigate the boardroom for in organisational culture, as in politics, as Faludi wrote, this is not an organised and centralised conspiracy. Its workings are encoded and internalised, diffuse and chameleonic. What the leader chooses to pay attention to, and when, will have a direct influence on their chances of success. Raising awareness of these issues and disseminating the concept of 'leadership thinking' can only help to tangibly make a difference to all of our lives by helping leaders act with grace, foresight, intelligence and wisdom. And maybe a touch of style too. **Dr. Gareth L. Smith**