

CRITICAL AND UPCOMING ISSUES IN LEADERSHIP

Style. A word usually associated with élan, 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, using 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 with intelligence and wisdom.

To what surrounding waters might we be casting these new thinkers into? Politically we are fast approaching the 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

Conversely now is no time for hero leaders, hewn from the thin, garish cloth of short termism. It would be too tempting to make calls for action, unaware that you were engaging in Camus' tyrannical bear-trap.

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

If we ask 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?

At one of my favourite coffee bars it tells you, in screamingly large lettered wallpaper, *"the pressure is good for you"*. That may be true for carefully selected, perfectly roasted, beautifully fresh and lovingly prepared coffee beans but does it apply to leaders too? I believe 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]

A further challenge for the leaders of today is how to become wonderful listeners?

Lastly, a facet of a leader's life that I feel will be ever-present; they will still require the requisite skills to navigate the boardroom, because 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. **Dr. Gareth L. Smith**

^[1] David Kelly, 1981

^[2] Anne Rawthorn, 2013

^[3] Aesthetica, August 2013, p24