Introduction

Nelson Mandela is one of the most admired leaders of our age. An epic hero who overcame enormous obstacles, he has long been a symbol of justice for oppressed people. His skills as an actor and impassioned orator are legendary. But Mandela has always been more than an idealist. He’s a man of profound vision, an immortalist, who also possesses the power-brokering talents needed to unite a party, a movement and a nation. A persuasive and sensitive ambassador, he has become one of the world’s elder statesmen. Perhaps most impressively of all, he was for years a victim of a morally bankrupt regime, yet at the expense of his freedom he refused to renounce the cause in which he believed.

As Mandela’s example shows, truly great leaders must be convincing heroes, consummate actors, self-confident immortalists, shrewd power brokers, effective ambassadors and, when necessary, willing victims. Those are the six dimensions of leadership.

Leaders as Heroes

The idea that effective business leaders have heroic qualities has a lengthy pedigree, from Henry Ford to Bill Gates. Corporate heroes are liberating forces — they’re incorruptible, no-nonsense folks who counteract the forces of anarchy and disorder, restoring peace and tranquility to their organizations.

Heroes are characters with whom others naturally identify, and that diminishes the anxiety, fears and loneliness of followers. Heroes make success seem attainable for others, and symbolize the culture of the organization. They foster loyalty and, most importantly, they’re role models, personifying organizational strengths and setting standards for performance.

When required, effective leaders cast themselves as:

• Epic heroes, who claim the right to lead by virtue of the difficulties they’ve overcome. Epic heroes are individuals who undertake a perilous journey that involves a crucial struggle.

• Symbolic heroes, whose authority derives from their association with some idea, movement or achievement. This requires leaders to be sensitive to how others see them, because that will affect the commitment and performance of subordinates.

• Playful heroes, whose leadership style uses humor, and who blend the worlds of work and play. In some cases, it’s merely a gentle style of witticism, but the exploits of some leaders, such as Richard Branson of Virgin or Wayne Huizenga of Blockbuster, fit the repertoire of professional comedians.

• Warrior heroes, who understand their role to be like that of a general leading their organization into battle. They wage war against other companies and sacrifice the careers and livelihoods of others through closures, layoffs and beating competitors.

Leaders as Actors

Managing and leading are performance arts. The leader must put on a performance that holds the attention of the workplace audience, is plausible and...
coherent, and strikes followers as “real.” As an actor, the leader must make the organization and its activities seem logical and sensible, giving employees an attractive role in the world that they can relate to and find deeply meaningful.

These leaders act as:
- Poets, framing convincing images for their subordinates. They search for a theme or aspect of existence that no one else sees in quite the same way, wresting a coherent image of the way ahead from the chaos of conflicting trends and data.
- Rhetoricians, who energize and inspire their audience with their language. John Sculley, of Pepsi and then Apple, went to the theatre to watch how actors performed on stage, practiced his own performances for hours on end, and even hired a speech coach to perfect his technique.
- Storytellers, who focus and amplify others’ beliefs. The stories serve as easily remembered guides to action that others enjoy retelling, extending the leader’s reach into the furthest corners of the organization.
- Show-men and show-women, who dramatize and explain through action, be it Bill Gates riding into an employee meeting on a Harley Davidson or Forrest Mars throwing poorly wrapped Mars Bars across his boardroom. Such events live on in the collective memory of organizations.

Leaders as Immortalists

An immortalist is a visionary, whose high self-esteem and desire to succeed stand as a beacon to followers. Such leaders not only help create a vision but also embody it, imprinting their ideas and personalities on the organization. Under the leadership of Jack Welch, General Electric seemed almost an extension of the man at the top. Intel has been called the personal creation of its chief executive, Andy Grove.

There are two broad sub-dimensions of immortalism — constructive and destructive. Constructively immortalistic leaders have a generally positive influence on their organizations. They play two roles:
- Rebels, who build by revolution. They revolt against traditional ideas — ideas of what constitutes reasonable organizational principles, of what strategies will succeed, and of what’s technologically possible or desirable. That’s what Sam Walton did when he saw the opportunity for Wal-Mart in small towns across America, or Herb Kelleher did when he built Southwest Airlines on a new idea of what many people wanted from short-haul operators: low fares and no frills.
- Virtuosos, who make use of some special talent — such as being an effective negotiator, convincing salesperson or silver-tongued orator — that sets them apart from others. Like virtuoso musicians, their performances are spellbinding.

Destructive immortalists, who can have an overwhelmingly unhealthy impact on their organizations, fall into two classifications:
- Dramatics, who are noted for their flamboyance and revel in sycophantic attention from subordinates. They tend to be highly impulsive and hoard power, often becoming isolated at the top and suspicious of others.
- Conceiteds, who are driven by pride and pursue strategic visions that lead to disaster. This substitution of unrealistic personal goals for reasonable organizational goals is an exercise in hubris. By virtue of the positions they hold, CEOs are particularly prone to the ego-corrupting influences of power.

Leaders as Power Brokers

Leaders deal in power. They accomplish goals by mobilizing others to act on their behalf. But leaders don’t possess all the power in their organizations. They must direct and channel the energies of others, reconciling differences, coaxing and cajoling where possible, directing when necessary. They must listen and be watchful, knowing when to cut deals that suit their ends, or buy off, demote or undermine rivals.

A leader’s power is bound up with the resources at his or her disposal — knowledge, skills, time, budgets, charisma, energy, even, in some instances, sexuality. Power is manifested in leaders’ attempts to manipulate how their people think, the values and beliefs they subscribe to, and how they behave.

Leaders need to be comfortable and adept at four facets of power broking. They must be:
- Despots, whose naked use of raw power attracts both ardent admiration and intense revulsion among followers and commentators. “You’ve got to be hard to be soft,” advises Jack Welch. “You have to demonstrate the ability to make the hard, tough decisions — closing plants, divesting, delaying — if you want to have any credibility when you try to promote the soft values.”
- Manipulators, who deal in power in rather the
same way as puppeteers control their puppets, getting them to do things they wouldn’t otherwise do.

- Conductors, who co-ordinate without being overly imposing or egocentric. They harmonize the efforts of diverse factions in the organization.
- Empowerers, who encourage their subordinates to believe they have the power to make a difference. They build partnerships with colleagues and subordinates, helping others to grow and flourish.

Leaders as Ambassadors
Organizations aren’t closed systems. Leaders need a sophisticated understanding of the extent to which the health of their companies depends on external factors. They also need to deal effectively with significant individuals and institutions on behalf of their organization, establishing a positive public profile. They build and maintain relationships, acquire and disseminate information, and negotiate deals.

The business leader’s ambassadorial roles are internal as well — collecting and disseminating information within the organization.

Leaders play four roles in this effort:
- Relationship builders, skilled in forging and maintaining external relationships with constituencies such as politicians, bankers and the public.
- Salespeople, who not only court good relations with customers but are deal makers too.
- Melders, who operate internally within their own organizations, integrating them and creating corporate character. They forge empathetic relationships with ordinary employees, being sensitive to their views while attempting to shape them through interactions and appearances at various organizational forums.
- Information acquirers, highly sensitive to their environment, able to absorb significant information, which is relayed to others in their organizations and which informs corporate strategies.

Leaders as Victims
Corporate leaders often must be victims to ensure their continued health and that of their organizations. Self-confident leaders, sure of their abilities and authority, are willing to take the blame for problems even when they aren’t directly responsible for them.

There’s an important distinction here between willing and unwilling victims. Willing victims make sacrifices for the organization to facilitate learning and produce a healthier culture. Unwilling victims are forced into that role — by others, by circumstances beyond their control, or due to some internal psychological dysfunction.

The two types of willing victims are:
- Victim-learners, who use the situation to show that the organization must tolerate mistakes in order to learn and move ahead. They neutralize human tensions, reducing hostilities and even strengthening their authority by admitting error.
- Victim-humanizers, who provide convenient targets for criticism, allowing the organization to move on.

Unwilling victims fall into two groups:
- Victims of conspiracy, who fall prey to powerful forces, internally or externally.
- Victims of self, who contribute to their own downfall by their self-destructive behavior.

Conclusion
Being a constantly successful leader requires excellence in most, if not all, of the six dimensions of leadership. Ideally, leaders should be believable heroes, fine actors, high-self-esteem immortalists, astute power brokers, sensitive ambassadors and, on occasion, calculating victims. If it sounds difficult, that’s because being an effective leader is a challenging business.

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