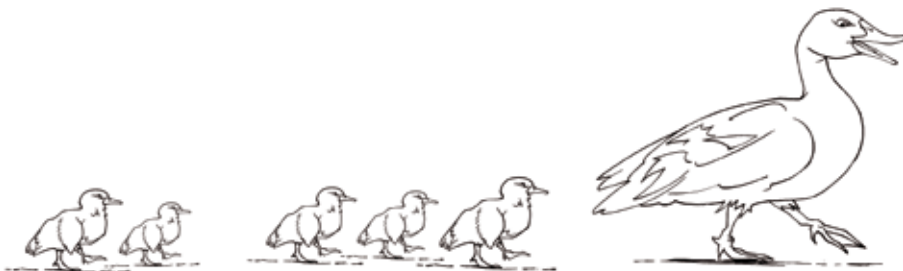


REAL LEADERSHIP



BY PROFESSOR KURT APRIL

“I refute the notion that the current state of affairs has an economic explanation.”



The problem with our organisations and corporations is nowhere more stark than when business leaders claim that “The business of business is business” and public leaders add, “The current system is failing due to the past.” In the main, a syndrome of selfishness concerned with economic personhood has taken hold of our private and public organisations, and it has left us spiritless, uninspired and confused about our own values.

Many (but not all) leaders seem to have developed an instinctive paranoia towards their moral contract to make a positive contribution to society. It’s as if the steady diet of half-truths and narrow paradigms fed to them over time has wiped their greater consciousness that

true and lasting happiness comes when you stop treating the world as if it were just a backdrop to your own journey. On the public front, one has to look no further than the growing divide between the elected and the electorate, the increase in legitimate protest and, more worryingly, in civil unrest, to have an idea of how awry the idea of leadership in our public sector has gone.

I refute the notion that the current state of affairs has an economic explanation. I believe the problem lies in the differentiated distribution of wealth and its accompanying (and ongoing) structures of power, lack of purpose on an individual level, the emptiness of individual and societal spirit, and a shying away from personal accountability by individuals and communities alike.

Humans are not at conflict with themselves, because that is our natural tendency or because the business of business is just business. We are in conflict because those we trust to serve as our leaders have woefully failed to carry the mantle of authority, choosing instead to labour pointlessly under the delusions of failed concepts of leadership.

There is a powerful need today to develop leaders who can meet the complex and multifaceted challenges of the 21st century. This need is global and covers all fields of endeavour and all levels of society – from primary school to parliament. What is needed is a reorientation towards living dedicated lives and seeking excellence in all that we do, in order to attract the willing following and discretionary effort of the stakeholders we serve. Such real leadership is not born out of position, political affiliation, popularity or authority, and it does not occur overnight.

Real leadership is about wanting to be the best for the world and not just the best in the world. It is premised on the very choices a leader makes, over time, and which ultimately set that leader’s character apart – a dedication that others, sometimes, do not even understand in the short term.

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