

# LEADING YOUR ORGANIZATION TO SUCCEED

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What have you been doing lately to change your organization for the better?  
What have you been willing to be responsible for transforming in your workplace or in your business?

I ask these questions because if you are reading this article you almost certainly are in a leadership role. There is a very good chance also that you are one of the fifteen hundred senior managers who have engaged in leadership development work with us over the past decade. In which case, I think I know a little bit about you.

One of the things that I can be confident in saying about you is that you have a strong and inspiring purpose which sits behind the work that you do. That purpose may have become covered over again, or suppressed, or beaten down by reality, but almost certainly it is still sitting there. If you are out of touch with it you can just scratch the surface again and get back in touch with its energy.

For a long time I have been making the same simple toast at the end of senior leadership programs: “May you all go and change your part of the world for the better”. If you are one of those former participants of our leadership development programs you probably glimpsed the possibility on that course that you could be a bigger and better and more fulfilled leader than you were allowing yourself to be. You probably experienced a level of collaboration with others which amazed you and you wished you could transport it back to your own people and your own organization. You undoubtedly witnessed how individuals and groups can change and transform themselves and you wished you could make that happen back with your own people or business. And you probably remember the incredible creativity and insight that was unleashed by the process and you wished you could bottle that for your own organization.

Some of you even made commitments to yourselves to take these lessons back to your own people, to change things for the better and to help move your organizations to a new level of performance, collaboration, innovation and success. I know this because many of you have been inviting me and my fellow collaborators into your organisations since then to conduct workshops, development programs and consulting assignments to support your own leadership and change efforts. I have seen for myself how keen you are to make a greater contribution to your own organizations. I have witnessed your boldness and courage in sharing these possibilities with your colleagues, and your willingness to take risks and even make yourself vulnerable for them. I have admired the intelligence of your leadership initiatives and I have been amazed at your persistence even in the face of considerable cynicism and resistance at times from your own colleagues. Frankly, I have been exhilarated and humbled by your on-going commitment to leadership and success.

I have been struck by the diversity of challenges and opportunities which arise in the work that I have done with you and your Executive Teams and Senior Leadership Groups. There seems to be no shortage of adaptive challenges in your organizations requiring leadership to address them. And many of you appear willing to take on the responsibility of ensuring that your people both can and do address these needs and opportunities. In one executive group with which I have worked the key opportunity to emerge has been the chance for general managers to genuinely support each other in their functional roles while going beyond functional squabbles and blinkers to think and act more strategically as an executive team. In other executive teams the key challenge has been to own up to the divided camps ( entrepreneurs v's compliers; regional v's global operators; engineers v's tradies ) that were holding back their performance and to experience how these structural problems could dissolve if all of them including the CEO developed more sophisticated forms of communicating, relating and problem-solving.

In one senior leadership group I have worked with in the government sector the challenge has been to recognize and to overcome the strong undertow of resignation and sense of powerlessness which pervaded their conversation and behaviour. In another very successful and innovative building company the CEO was searching for ways to get his senior managers to move beyond their

technical expertise and also to take responsibility for growing the talent of their people. Another CEO of a start-up company wanted her very young team of senior managers to step up despite their youth and inexperience and accept more leadership responsibility in dealing with clients and stakeholders.

Organizations and people can be very adaptive, inventive and co-operative – it just requires some of us to exercise leadership. Human beings are naturally but not always adaptive, inventive and co-operative – we have proven it throughout our history on this planet and it has been our winning edge as a species. Some readers of this article will know that I am one of those people who is concerned with how we human beings are treating our natural environment and our natural resources. I don't know how any intelligent, breathing human being, whatever your commercial interests or political preferences, could not be worried! But I take great solace from the optimism of some of the leading thinkers and actors in this field. Award-winning nature writer Diane Ackerman, in her recent book "The Human Age", pulls no punches in telling the story of how we are trashing our planet and the potential catastrophes which we face, and yet she counts herself an optimist and writes: "Our new age, for all its sins, is laced with invention ... our mistakes are legion, but our talent is immeasurable".

Often I have found environmentalist Bob Brown's public persona to be as dour and beige as his name, yet I discover that he too has called his recent autobiography "Optimism", that it is laced with a delightful wry humour, and this galvanizing sentence by him from a eulogy for a friend jumped out of the page at me: "She believed in the ability of people to get together to change the world for the better". Public leaders will need to help us all to be more inventive, adaptive and co-operative if we are to deal successfully with some of our most pressing social challenges, and you will need to do the same if you are to help your own businesses and organizations to deal with their own daily challenges, and to flourish and succeed.

Speaking of daily challenges, this is the other big leadership issue which I have found many of you are struggling with in your own organizations. You are often almost drowning from your own daily challenges and your organization seems obsessed with short term demands. I recommend that you get a copy of the strategy classic "The Alchemy of Growth" by Baghai, Coley and White, and

familiarize yourself with their Three Horizons Framework. This is a very simple and powerful tool to use in helping your organization to pull its head out of the sand (many of you are also operating in competitive external markets and I will take a look at elements of competitive strategy in future articles and here I recommend the recent book “Playing to Win” by Lafley and Martin). The compelling argument in *Alchemy* is that successful companies and leadership groups must be working on all three time horizons **concurrently**. Horizon One is basically the one year Performance or Budget Horizon which regularly dominates our attention, and understandably, because in this horizon failure means failure with all its dire consequences. Horizon Two is what many of us call the Strategy Horizon of three to five years and this is the timeframe for growth, choices and investment. Horizon Three is the Future Shaping Horizon of fifteen years or more and this is the timeframe for futures thinking, experimentation and dramatic paradigm shifts. Managers get stuck playing in Horizon One exclusively, but Leaders play across all three Horizons concurrently.