



DARRYL COOKE ON LEADERSHIP

IN THE SECOND PART OF HIS SERIES ON LEADERSHIP, DARRYL COOKE EXPLAINS THE NEED TO LEAD FROM THE FRONT WHEN THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN.



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Let slip the dogs of war...

Last month I wrote of the need for leaders to show their ability to lead people and gain followers, whether managing a football team, chairing the village hall committee or running the largest industrial conglomerate in the world. Without followers you are simply taking a walk.

And how much more important those skills are when you are under pressure from declining markets and general pessimism. Apart from reducing costs to maintain your solvency, the only way of growing your business is to steal market share from your competition. This is your war. This is where good leadership shines through. Anything less

father before him were considered experts in military strategy due to their many victories.

Over time, several successful military leaders have studied Sun Tzu and attributed their victories to his principles – leaders such as Mao Tse-Tung. Moreover, because of the clarity of the texts, his principles are now applied to many businesses and Sun Tzu is studied and implemented by leaders throughout the world, particularly in Asia.

Sun Tzu's overriding principle is that battles or competitions are won by the organisation or person who has the greatest competitive advantage and who makes the fewest mistakes.

victory over the odds. It is a time to reach consensus and build commitment with your management team, and then to mobilise your wider organisation behind the chosen battles on an ongoing and daily basis.

Choose battles that are specific, that are market-focused, that will make a real difference to the impact the company will make in the market, that are achievable in the medium term [the battle is now] and that will create a buzz and excitement in the organisation generating real energy from within.

It's also time to review your management team. Are they up to the challenge? Can they deliver on the "Must Win Battles"? Are there others in the business with the character and ambition that will get you through? Perhaps it's time to have your team independently assessed to ensure you have the right people on the bus and, even more importantly, in the right seats ready for the battle ahead.

Finally, it's time to show true leadership. Communications to your staff have to be confident, clear as to your aims, and logical – challenging them to follow and support, but making it clear you will at all times do whatever is best for the business.

You must maintain integrity and so you must be true to your word. Never be anything other than straight and gain their respect, confidence and encouragement. Success belongs to the leader who passionately believes in what he or she is trying to achieve, who never gives up and who can communicate their passion to enthuse others to follow.

Without this, you have nothing. Sir Ken Morrison of Wm Morrison said, "You can't push a bit of string, you have to pull it. In leadership you have to be at the front where the action is, you have to set the pace. Knowing where the action is, is your job".

Let your competition fall away because of their lack of strategy, communication, execution or integrity while yours goes from strength to strength. ■

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is likely to lead your business into terminal decline.

Warren Buffet recently wrote, "Bad news is an investor's best friend. It lets you buy a slice of the future at a marked down price." As a leader in business, this is your opportunity to restructure, take market share and come through as a stronger, more efficient and profitable business. As Demetri Martin quipped, "I ordered a wake up call the other day. The phone rang and a woman's voice said, 'What the hell are you doing with your life?'"

This can be your wake up call, your war. Never again will you have management and staff so willing to follow your direction. Kotter, in his "Eight Phases of Change", describes one of the main catalysts for change as being crisis, or a "burning platform" to remove complacency and inertia. Such burning platforms are often manufactured by CEOs to bring about change and establish a sense of urgency. Well, you certainly don't need to do that in the winter of 2008/09.

Sun Tzu lived in China 2,500 years ago, about the same time as Confucius. He and his

Competitive advantage can be gained by any number of factors including superior manpower or position, better execution or innovation, superior skills or simply working harder. But competitive advantage is not the determining factor in success. It is people who fight and win battles. And the most important person is the general.

It is time for you and your leadership team to dust off your strategy, fine-tune it so that it meets the needs of the current climate, and break it down into a few "Must Win Battles" or, as Stephen Covey says, into "Wildly Important Goals".

"Must Win Battles", a term developed by Peter Killing and Thomas Malnight, are those three-to-six key battles that you must win in order to achieve your key objectives. Focus and priority are key, ensuring your management team focus only on the major battles. This terminology, I would suggest, is infinitely preferable in a time such as now, when to survive means competitors must be fought and defeated, when the battles are urgent and important, and the outcome is

