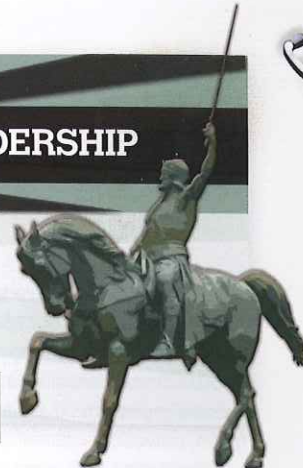




DARRYL COOKE ON LEADERSHIP

A LEADER NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES. DARRYL COOKE SEEKS OUT THE MANAGERIAL HIGHER GROUND.



Look sharp

The poet, journalist and novelist Anatole France said, "To accomplish great things we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan but also believe."

It is hard to imagine a truly successful leader who has not had that belief in himself and his dream. To create that large vision or that big hairy audacious goal (BHAG) described by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in "Built To Last", a leader must take time out to form his views and create clarity.

The world we live in today has become increasingly complicated and more stressful. When our parents grew up or

is to provide direction. To do so he must take time out alone, "kick leaves" to work out that vision. A visiting Lord Chancellor once delivered a lecture at the university at which I studied. At the end of the lecture one student asked, "What advice would you give to someone setting out on their career?"

"Take lots of baths," was the response. I doubt if he was referring to the cleanliness of that set of students; rather, he was making the point that you need to take time away from the coalface to be able to see the wood for the trees and plan ahead. Even Jesus, at the start of his ministry,

It may be rarer to achieve but it requires no greater suffering. The leader's role is to fix the goals and keep his managers and people focused on those goals every day.

As soon as the vision is set, there is a layer of bureaucracy in almost any business that seeks to create complications. It is important that the leader keeps his people focused on the end in mind, that he or she will always strip away the layers of treacle to ensure the end result is the focus in everyone's day-to-day operations.

The message must be kept simple. Every person in the organisation must be able to articulate the vision in a few short lines and at any time of day or night. Only when that has been achieved can you truly claim that everyone is focused on the vision.

You cannot give the message and then walk away. It will need to be put across time and time again, and in many different forms using every type of communication, to change the corporate culture. The majority of firms make the mistake of launching visionary programmes or value programmes in a splurge of publicity and then leaving them to wither on the vine.

Having set the vision, created clarity and communicated it, the one thing the leader must do, which no-one else in the organisation can do, is to be flexible. Leaders should not get so committed to one way of execution that they cannot see a new or better way. Nor should they be so committed to one way that they cannot see new opportunities that may arise.

As Colin Powell announced to his people at the State Department: "Once we have looked at all the rough edges and we have made a decision as to what we are going to do, then we are all going to move out in that decision and stick with it, with coherence and consistency over time, unless it has been proven that we should move in a different direction." ■

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older readers were children there would be two types of bread in the supermarket: white or brown. Today there will be 30 or 40 – creating choice but also bringing the stress of decision making.

We are inundated with data. Some say you cannot have too much but that is not true. Just buying toothpaste is a challenge.

And amidst all of this is technology: a global network of everything connected to everything in real time. The world is chaotic, complicated and murky but when a leader makes the complex simple, people can more readily be motivated to achieve the extraordinary. Colin Powell, former US Secretary of State, said, "If you cannot explain it to your mother, then maybe you do not really understand it."

A leader needs to be crystal clear on what the issues are and where the company is going. He must take complex issues, break them down and set them out in a way that is easy to understand. This analytical capacity is crucial and must be aligned with a skill and strong desire to simplify rather than complicate.

The most important role of the leader

spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness contemplating the task ahead.

A big hairy audacious goal or BHAG is one way of stimulating progress. A BHAG is a huge daunting goal but it is clear and compelling and the people in your organisation should buy into it immediately.

It provides focus, excitement, and builds an immediate sense of pride from the people within the organisation as it creates team spirit and galvanises your workforce to their ultimate goal. Striving to hit a budget is rarely exciting but striving to achieve a major goal can bring people together in an organisation like nothing else. A real leader creates a vision of a future for the business that is so powerful and exciting that the people in the organisation want to be part of it and cannot wait to carry it out.

It is not the leader's job to execute every excruciating detail but to see the bigger picture and surround him or herself with great people who can be trusted to do their jobs. It is no harder to build something great than it is to build something good.