

Managing Change – Leading Innovation

A guest article by Hervé Bosquet

Hervé Bosquet (Senior Advisor Global Association Hubs Partnership) talks about leadership, and how managers should act in turbulent times. Lots of people will hang on to business-as-usual, and will initially resist change. Real leaders will anticipate this change, deal with ambiguity, inspire others and influence outcomes. What does it take to be a true leader? And are these talents the same as those associated with being an effective manager?

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Running a business or a unit is much like sailing. Dead calm sea or stormy winds: it is rarely plain sailing. And sometimes the boat loses direction. When that happens, watch the crew. Pessimists blame it on the wind. Optimists wait for the wind to change. Leaders take control and adjust the sail.

Having had the privilege of working with quite a few managers in different environments, I have noted that the majority of them lack clarity about their role in turbulent times. Most will hang on to business-as-usual. Resistance to change will prevent them from rocking the boat.

It is precisely then that a few people emerge from the crowd. Not only do they see things in a different way, they also know how to anticipate change, deal with ambiguity, influence outcomes, inspire others, generate buy-in. We call them leaders. Let's take a look at what it takes to be a true leader, and contrast these talents with those associated with being an effective manager.

Managing Change

Most of us in business have been trained to perform well as managers, working with formal structures and hierarchies, systems and procedures, rules and

regulations... We excel in preserving the core of our business. What we don't realize is that, when managing the status quo, we breed a culture that is an anchor to change.

The baby-boomers among us probably remember successful companies that were at the pinnacle in the 80's and the 90's and have virtually disappeared from the radar. Ironically, success often breeds change-resistant cultures. Management gets more and more complacent, even arrogant about its own wonderfulness and stops listening. They turn inward and start centralizing things around themselves. Building more of the same is the name of the game. Control becomes the overriding objective to perpetuate the sacrosanct corporate identity and culture.

When eventually things start going less well, it was too late for them to re-invent, transform, and take the U-turn that was required to remain the leaders they had been up until then.

Leading innovation

What explains the success of AirBnB, Uber and Expedia, just to take a few planetary examples we all know in the hospitality industry? Granted, technological breakthroughs are often at the origin of disruption



or innovation in the market. This, however, does not fully explain the success of these young players in our field. They essentially realized that the old model was running out of steam.

In coming up with an alternative model they ride trends in society - digitalization, shared economy, globalization, and focus on what hospitality is all about. Building loyalty and trust, turning user friendliness and customer care into a value and, to crown it all, at a substantial price differential, are the real reasons behind their success. They also excel in communicating, empowering, stimulating progress, and nurturing a culture that is adaptive to change.

In our hospitality industry, we are all buyers of products and services we sell. This puts us at a tremendous advantage, compared to other sectors of activity. We also get instant feedback via on-line platforms. What strikes in reading users' comments on TripAdvisor for example, is that these essentially express feelings and emotions that rarely challenge our IQ.

Great leaders are in touch with their own and their clients' feelings and emotions. They have an above average emotional intelligence. This sensitivity helps them to spot opportunities in the market and build

an adequate response. They understand that their clients function around likes and dislikes. Just as we all do.

Projecting yourself as a client will greatly facilitate your assumptions on what the future should look and feel like in your area of business. Your competencies as a leader start with figuring out what the market will like and dislike. If you can picture the world that your clients will prefer, you have taken a giant leap towards successful innovation.

The next step is to imagine what you see, hear and feel when this preferred future is in place. Once again, focus on feelings and emotions. When you have that picture clearly in your heart, more than in your head, then work backwards: what did you have to do to bring this change about? What new ways of doing business were required? Acting from the future instead of towards the future makes you move out of your comfort zones. This is how most innovating breakthroughs become reality.

After you will have established direction, communicate, align your people, get feedback, motivate, inspire, develop, coach... and you will be well on your way to being the leader in your business.



Who is Hervé Bosquet?

Hervé Bosquet has 30 years of experience as international advisor in whole systems change, transformational leadership, and change interventions in complex organisational structures.

After working as Director of Public Programs for MCE, the European headquarters of the American Management Association (AMA), working as a Change Management Consultant for several multinationals and institutions and being director of the Brussels Convention Bureau for 13 years, he now works as Senior Adviser for the Global Associations Hubs Partnership.

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Leadership at its best

Dara Khosrowshani, from Iranian origin, was the former CEO of Expedia. He was just called in to head up Uber. Here is what he is reported to have said in his farewell message to his former employees:

I have to tell you I am scared. I've been at Expedia for so long that I've forgotten what life is like outside this place. But the times of greatest learning for me have been when I've been through big changes, or taken on new roles... You have to move out of your comfort zone and develop muscles that you didn't know you had.

Admitting vulnerability demonstrates strong leadership. The message behind his first eight words is very powerful. It means: « f you fear to fail, you are not different from me. I understand and will support you.»

If you don't move, you will not make mistakes. The key is to learn as you move. Reward and longevity will eventually come with taking calculated risks. Challenging the status quo may feel uncomfortable at first. If you fear or doubt, IMAGINE what success would feel like...

IMAGINE the reward when you will have taken your business to its next higher level of performance!

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