



My English teacher used to say that poetry is condensed thought. According to the blurb on the back of the book this is “concentrated leadership juice” which, whilst a slightly disturbing phrase, is pretty accurate. The authors have crammed an immense number of valuable ideas (and real-world experiences) into a very readable format - I managed it in a return train journey to London. Admittedly I live in Yorkshire, not Essex, but that’s still pretty impressive. Does that mean it’s short on substance? Absolutely not. It’s certainly short on waffle, but each chapter is dripping with good ideas, quotes and stories. If you’re anything like me you’ll find your copy will end up doubling in size from all the ad hoc bookmarks you shove in.

The big problem addressed by this book is that most “leaders” are anything but inspired, and miles away from inspiring. A study commissioned by the authors found that the most desired quality in a leader was “inspiration”, but only 10% felt that they had experienced this at work. Business leaders are still seen as “the boss”. Which figures come to mind as

business leaders? Mr Burns and David Brent are two archetypes that shouldn’t be accurate, but too often still are. So what do leaders need to do differently, and what would their businesses look like?

The secrets in summary

Secret 1 - Leadership is viral: pass it on

Leadership is not management. This doesn’t mean that management is bad and leadership is good, but you can’t lead by managing. Good leaders give others the resources, inspiration and support to become leaders in their own right.



The wicked leader is he who the people despise.
The good leader is he who the people revere.
The great leader is he of whom the people say
“We did it ourselves”
Lao Tsu, Tao te Ching



Secret 2 - You’re not fooling anyone

Truth is the only option you have (resonance with BJ Cunningham’s take on branding here). Ever greater information transparency means that you can’t hope to maintain a sham any more. Set your vision, market it, live it internally and that will flow through to what customers experience. Corporate Social

Responsibility is not something you can tack on to the outside, it has to be ingrained in your business. The agenda now is Corporate Social Opportunity - Innocent Drinks is a great example of a brand that is built on an ethical basis.

Secret 3 - They have to want to follow you

Work-life balance misses point - it shouldn’t be about balancing a necessary evil against “life”, work should be part of your life! If it’s not fun then you need to reinvent your workplace. It’s no longer enough to manage your human “resources” as if they were consumables or raw materials - you need to engage their energy in your business.

Secret 4 - Make a difference

Commoditisation and conformity are the bane of most markets. Differentiation is the only way to beat the competition. But innovation often isn’t all that innovative - most “new” ideas are merely borrowed from other sectors or other contexts. But ideas are cheap (and easy). The hard part is coming up with a reliable innovation process which controls risk whilst allowing good ideas room to grow before they are evaluated to death. The job of the leader is to “be like Madonna”. No, you can put down the pointy bra - constant reinvention is the key.



DIFFERENT IS HARDER TO BEAT THAN BETTER



Secret 5 - Lead from the edge

All the important action takes place on the



BOOK REVIEW

Continued: Phil Dourado & Dr Phil Blackburn, Seven Secrets of Inspired Leaders

front line, interacting with customers, not in the ivory towers of senior management. In the pull economy you need to be at the edge to understand how the customer experience looks and feels from the outside.



WE'VE PUT THE RIFLE IN THE HANDS OF THE DEER

FRED NEWELL



Secret 6 - There's nothing out there

Global business is coming, ready or not. But that doesn't mean homogeneity, it means glocal or even multi-local (HSBC's current approach). If you think about the statistics there is no doubt that jobs are bound to move overseas - with cheap graduates and postgraduates available increasingly the R&D as well as manufacturing jobs will move to India and other new economies. Export jobs or import people is the question in addressing Europe's aging population.

Secret 7 - The impossible isn't

Do the impossible is where innovation



'THE IMPOSSIBLE' IS JUST SOMETHING THAT HASN'T BEEN DONE IN YOUR SECTOR YET



(and differentiation) comes from. Fire (creativity) and ice (caution) need to be balanced. Innovation comes from trying things, and being prepared to fail. But that doesn't mean you have to gamble the farm - practising smart risk allows you to be innovative, and prepared to fail, in firewalled key areas.

Plus the bonus secret - Get an NBA, not an MBA

A New Business Architecture - everything from IT systems to hierarchies may be different in an organisation with inspired leadership. IT systems need to be focused on external customer control - leadership from the edge again.



HIERARCHY IS AN ORGANIZATION WITH ITS FACE TO THE BOSS AND ITS ASS TO THE CUSTOMER

JACK WELCH



The upside-down organisation is still a useful model - leadership is seen as support for the front line. Measurement of soft as well as hard metrics is key.

Our review

Taking each secret on its own, there's not a huge amount that'll be new here if you keep up to date with your reading. What this book does that is unique is to distil a huge number of ideas into a very small space and couple that with lots of insight from the people who have been there and done it.

This book is an engaging call-to-arms for would-be leaders who want to reinvent themselves and their organisations. Without question you'll leave the book with a host of ideas that you're itching to put into practice in your own organisation. Best of all, as I write this it's half price on amazon.co.uk, so you definitely owe yourself a copy!

Web links:

www.phildourado.com

www.inspiredleaders.com

(seems to be awaiting new content at the moment)

www.ecsw.com

