

Are your leaders really leading or are they behaving more like managers? Here leadership expert, Steve Radcliffe, points out how much organisations have to gain by ensuring their leaders are in effective leadership mode.

Unleashing the leader in Harry

Instant improvements available to leaders who practise The Shifts to Leadership



Richard Baker (left) with Steve Radcliffe.

I hadn't seen him for a month. I wondered how he'd been. I needn't have worried. He was back in gear, back in Leader Mode!

Harry is a senior leader in Boots. I'd met him in the first leg of the leadership development programme I was running there. He was pleasant enough but there was no real spark. One month on, Harry had reconnected with what he cared about. He was energised by his picture of who he wanted to be as a leader; he was engaging people in his ambition for the business and he was

having bold conversations to make new things happen, fast.

Sadly in 15 years of consulting, I've met thousands of people in business, government, education and charities who behave just like Harry; people in leadership positions who have lost sight of themselves as leaders and have slipped back into what I call their Operator/Manager Mode, where their focus is on managing and doing, not leading. **I now believe this is one of the major reasons why so many organisations perform way below what's possible.**

I see three powerful factors in play. First, we all have a very well developed Operator/Manager Mode – after all, it's our competence at doing and managing that helped us get promoted – and we can feel more comfortable in this mode. Second, although their organisations are asking the Harrys of this world to lead, they can also put them under relentless pressure to review the past and manage the present, rather than focus on the future. Third, our typical Harry does not grasp how fundamentally different it is to lead; so he can spend most of his time in Operator/Manager Mode without even realising there he's there.

As a result there are Harrys everywhere not being the leader they want to be, not making the difference they want to make and, not taking time out to reflect on how it could be different.

There will probably be lots of people like Harry in your organisation. The good news is that it doesn't take long for such people to re-energise and transform their impact. Indeed Richard Baker, Chief Executive of Boots and now Alliance Boots, wanted exactly this from Boots leaders in 2006. As he put it, *"I needed our senior leaders more confident and on the front foot. I wanted a significant shift in our leadership. This development work helped us move there very quickly."*

Introducing the Shifts

The key in Boots and other organisations where I've worked has been helping people make *The Shifts to Leadership*. These are the Shifts I have seen which help people move fast out of Operator/Manager Mode and get back to being their powerful best. These Shifts are what distinguish the leader from the manager and are vital not just for the manager stepping up into a leader role, but also for all us leaders who can slip back into Operator/Manager – and yes we all do. Practising them can make immediate improvements to the impact of our leadership.

The first Shift underpins all aspects of leadership:

1. The Shift to Conscious Leadership

Not surprisingly, the first Shift is to become massively more self-aware in the moment, that is, aware of whether you are in Leader Mode now, and of what's encouraging you to slip into Operator/Manager. Immediate growth as a leader comes from the following practice:

- Getting clear what you are like in Leader and Operator/Manager Modes (how do you feel, what's your energy, what do you sound like?)
- Identifying when you find yourself in Operator/Manager but don't want to be
- Then picking some moments when you will simply choose to step into Leader Mode.

It's as simple as that and it is exactly what Harry did. He identified the many places he was being Operator/Manager, saw the possibility of this Shift and acted on it. The result was instant.

Now let's look at the Shifts that apply specifically to what I believe are the three essential aspects of leadership. The first of these is that leadership always starts in the Future. Whether you want a great Xmas party, an organisation that performs, or a prosperous society, your leadership always starts with an idea of the Future you want. Secondly, leaders then need to Engage people so that they *want* to build that Future together. And finally, leaders need to guide, develop and hold people accountable so that they Deliver great results. Future – Engage – Deliver.

Shifts to do with the Future

2. The Shift to Being Guided by the Future:

While we have been told a thousand times to 'start with the end in mind' or to 'think from the future', I still find this to be one of the most common causes of people failing to lead. When you are in Leader Mode, your thinking and behaviour is Guided by the Future. But the pull of the present and past is enormous and today's issues and problems are always right in our face. Under such pressure, the future you want can easily be lost unless you consciously stay in touch with it. This Shift therefore requires constant and conscious practise. I have seen excellent leaders eventually worn down into Operator/Manager mode by the demands of the present when in fact the leadership they needed could be found in the questions

THE BOOTS STORY

In summary, we have far too many underperforming organisations in all walks of life. I have seen at first hand that much of this is because people like Harry in leadership positions are too often sucked into Operator/Manager mode. We can do something about it – consciously practise the Shifts to Leadership. Here's how they had a major impact on the performance of Boots.

When Richard Baker became CEO of Boots in late 2003, he found a Company with some great people, but one that had lost sight of its core purpose and direction.

He was under a lot of scrutiny externally and there were high expectations of him internally – he needed to build a cadre of self-confident leaders around him that would re-energise the Company.

He needed to help the organisation's leaders shift quickly into powerful Leader Mode. As Stephen Lehane, Corporate HR Director, Alliance

Boots, put it *"We needed to prioritise leadership to bring a new energy into the business. This was a challenge but the leadership initiative that we have been running has had a big impact. People are behaving differently, there is a much greater sense of self-awareness and confidence is growing as people see the impact they are having on results."*

Richard Baker has been instrumental in shaping Boots' leadership direction and momentum. Working with Steve Radcliffe he identified that the success of Boots could come from being guided by a mission *'to be the world's best*

- Where do we really want to be? and
- What do we do next to help us get there?

3. The Shift to Seeing the Whole, the Big Picture:

It's also true that when the present pulls us into the short-term and into the detail, we can quickly lose sight of the big picture. I've often sat with teams and wondered, if I didn't know these individuals, would I be able to recognise the leader. Most often the leader has been the one best at taking a step back, seeing the big picture and keeping it alive. We all have the tendency to be drawn into the detail. Be aware of this and practise being in touch with:

- The bigger context, the 'why' you are here, and
- What's happening on the bigger scene – other parts of your organisation, your industry, even world trends.

Harry made these Shifts brilliantly. He reconnected with the bigger picture of what was important to him and what he cared about. And he was guided again by the picture of a Future he really wanted for himself, his colleagues and Boots. The transformation in energy was obvious to all.

Shifts to do with Engagement

It's always surprising to me to see how few leaders truly Engage their people. Yes leaders typically know how to communicate and give instruction but in many cases there's simply not enough engaging conversation. Yet without powerful engagement a leader will inevitably

fail in one of his or her prime responsibilities - having people *want* to build a new future with them. This points to a core Shift, namely the ability that leaders need to engage through their relationships.

4. The Shift to Building Big Relationships, Fast

Ultimately, it's in our interactions with others that our leadership shows up – or not! And if we paused to think, we'd see that engaging and leading others is so much easier and more effective when a strong relationship is already in place. In what I call your 'big' relationships where there is familiarity and trust, leading can seem effortless and work can be energising and creative. But in your 'small' relationships, work can seem slow, draining and limited. So the shift to powerful engagement includes shifting relationship-building to being a conscious practice. You can start now by considering:

- Who are the key players for you in building the future you want?
- With whom do you not have the size of relationship you want or need?
- What could you do next to build 'bigger' relationships with them, fast?

5. The Shift to Managing Your 'Shadow'

In addition to this, in order to be the most engaging you can be, there is a part of you that you must become aware of. I call it your 'Shadow'. Let me expand.

Can you think of someone who walks into your office space and instantly your energy and spirits drop? Yes, even before a word is spoken! I say they are casting their 'Shadow'. At times, all of us cast a 'Shadow' that lowers the energy of

health and beauty retailer', and from a clear purpose 'to help our customers look and feel better than they ever thought possible'.

The challenge he then faced was to Engage his fellow leaders and in a series of meetings with the top 50 leaders, he encouraged them to acknowledge the tough times before moving them to look at how they could co-invent a future they wanted to be a part of. These sessions were underpinned by a Leadership Development Programme designed to help these leaders shift fully into Leader Mode. And the results were immediate. The programme was designed so that three short workshops were each followed by time to get back into work and practise being in Leader Mode. That is, the programme was as much about the time between workshops as the workshops themselves.

Richard Baker was delighted at how quickly fellow leaders were engaging him with ideas on how the organisation could move faster and

smarter. Shifts were happening fast. Within months there was a different culture evolving in the business characterised by a positive attitude and a sense of alignment that built energy and pace. It became easier to address the key business challenges within a spirit of alignment and trust.

The leadership programme has also been a powerful enabler in equipping Boots leaders as the company merged with Alliance Unichem in 2006 to create a £14bn turnover international health and beauty business. As Baker summarised it: *"The leadership programme ensured that we stepped up to the challenge and were ready to shape the future we wanted. Business results have been on an upward trend – our share price in the newly merged business is the highest it has been in a decade, but the greatest satisfaction has been in seeing people emerge with far more confidence, energy and vision than they had before."*

those around us. Effective leaders learn how to manage this impact. The killer questions that you need to consider are these.

- How well do you know how it feels to be around you?
- What 'Shadow' you are casting, and when?

And this brings us back to your relationships. You'll need some 'big' ones with colleagues for them to be willing to give you feedback on your 'Shadow'. Are you clear now where you can get this feedback from?

Before we met, Harry's relationships had been going backwards. He hadn't been in touch with a Future he wanted so he hadn't needed to engage anyone. He had been casting a dark 'Shadow' on many colleagues but no-one had told him. When he realised this, everything quickly changed and he was soon back engaging people and building relationships with a passion.

Shifts to do with Delivery

Leading doesn't finish with a vision, with inspiration or with engagement. I believe it ends with delivery, execution and results. As Operator/Managers this was your territory; you were steeped in delivery. Notice your inclination to personally do the delivering. At times resist this habit and make two Shifts.

6. The Shift to Delivering through Others

How many times have you said to yourself 'oh, it's just easier if I do it myself' or 'she's too busy so I won't ask her'? Resist that urge! Yes, of course there will be some things you need to do for yourself but do not start with that assumption.

A key muscle to build here is the one of 'making big requests'. This is a massively underdeveloped practice for most of us – notice for a moment, just how well in different parts of life do you ask for what you really want. If you want to make a Shift now then consider

- What requests would you like to make of others that you are not making? and
- Either make some of those requests today or get honest about what is blocking you from doing so.

7. The Shift to Developing Others as Leaders

There was a surprise bonus to Harry having seen he'd slipped into his Operator/Manager Mode; he also saw that many colleagues had done the same. He therefore not only shifted himself back into leading, but he looked to develop others as leaders too.

This requires a particular mindset and is not one I often see. Yes, I meet lots of leaders committed to developing others, but often as 'good quality followers'. Developing others as leaders is extra and can multiply the energy for change dramatically in an organisation. How are you with this practice?

- Who is on your list of people you are developing *as leaders*?
- How well do you know what they care about and what they want to lead for in the Future?
- How regularly do you encourage them to practise the Shifts to Leadership?
- How fully do you give them feedback on the 'Shadow' they cast?

And finally

Here is the Shift that underpins your capacity to live all the others:

8. The Shift to Building a new Support Team

In a nutshell you can't do all of this leadership stuff alone! The increasing challenges of leading today mean you have to have your Support Team. You need colleagues to help you know your 'shadow'. And there will be times when you are set back, stuck and can't see the way ahead. This is when colleagues and outside support can help you see the bigger picture or let off steam and re-energise. Many of us are poor at asking for help. My encouragement is to practise this in the way they are doing at Boots where Harry and colleagues have started to build a mutually supportive community, in which they are all working at growing as leaders and calling on one another whenever they need help. It's really helped Harry's shift to being the leader he wants to be and make the difference he can.

Steve Radcliffe (steve@steveradcliffe.com) coaches and develops senior leaders throughout some of the UK's top organisations to stimulate breakthrough change and performance improvement. He is one of the leading thinkers in the field of leadership, a dynamic conference speaker and his first book on leadership is due to be published in 2007.

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