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The Change Leader
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Abstract

This writing takes a close look at the leadership style of one of the world's most successful and influential leaders of the 21st century. It maps this individual's style to the environment of this time and suggests the attributes that contributed to his success within this environment. This document compiles ideas and concepts from six authors into a summary of best practices for identifying and developing this type of leadership potential in other prospective leaders. Three of the publications represent peer-reviewed, primary research and four articles are cited for the purpose of defining and developing a specific concept or principle. Finally, this writing examines the learning from this project and determines its relevance and value as a source of information in support of the writer's long term research interest in implementing large-scale, complex change within an organization.

An Examination of the Life and Works of Richard Branson, 21st Century Change Leader

Introduction

For 21st century leaders, it is not about playing the game or mastering the game. For these leaders of transformation, it is about changing the game entirely. The predecessors of these 21st century leaders created their success stories through the building of a bigger, better, stronger, or more durable mousetrap. They were acclaimed for their success in single pursuits of interest, marked by milestone achievements in medicine, social science, education or perhaps politics. There is no doubt that many of these leaders embraced change as well. Their documented successes speak volumes on their ability to master their trade and deliver to mankind new information and new applications within their areas of expertise. Engineers of their time revolutionized the automotive industry with faster, sleeker and cleaner running automobiles. Technologists made dramatic changes to television and telephones, bringing the people across the planet to within shouting distance of one another. Breakthroughs in medicine have lengthened the lifespan and enhanced the quality of human life. At the same time, these contributions have made possible capabilities that, if not managed with prudent and ethical judgment, could prove to be devastating to the planet and its people. The innovator and leader who is the subject of this paper, gives new definition to the concept of 21st century leader. This leader is counted among those who have changed the game entirely. He demonstrates mastery of both innovation and integrity.

This paper looks first at the environment of the 21st century and the challenges faced by leaders of this time. It moves then to the requirements for successful leadership in this Century and on to an examination of the life and leadership style of one of the 21st Century's greatest examples of leadership in this era, British-born innovator, business magnate and humanitarian, Sir Richard Charles Nicholas Branson.

The 21st Century Environment

Never before has there been the potential for such dramatic change in the world and its people, change brought about through knowledge acquisition and application. Some proclaim that the world's knowledge is doubling every two to five years and one of the leaders of the information

age projects that, within the next couple of years, knowledge will double every eleven hours. (Gover, 2010). One can easily argue the authenticity of these specific claims, but there is little doubt that knowledge is increasing in logarithmic proportions and is likely to continue as long as there is knowledge to be gained.

With this increase in knowledge, there has been equally significant evidence of unethical handling of that knowledge. Wire-tapping, computer hacking, identity theft, money and information laundering have put the world and its people in jeopardy. The effort to secure the world's people has presented an even large problem for individual privacy, rendering it an unaffordable luxury.

The 21st century has also produced a population of people who unite for world; join forces to combat hunger, natural disasters, illiteracy, and corruption. They rally together, sharing their wealth, time and talents to help less fortunate people. They leave the comfort of their positions and places of residence to learn about and attend to the needs of people in distant lands and diverse cultures. The 21st century is truly a unique time.

This century has produced leaders who value life-long learning, independent thinking, and barrier breaking. They accept few artificial controls, rigid guidelines, procedures and restrictions. They see uncharted territory as opportunities to explore and roadblocks as momentary hurdles that must be jumped or disassembled and used to further the journey.

The environment for 21st century leaders is fertile ground for innovators who have mastered their own fears of failure as well as and their contentment with their momentary success. They are transformational leaders, ever learning, every growing and encouraging others to grow with them. They balance integrity with intellect, asking not only can it be done, but should it be done. They know that everything that is possible is not necessarily prudent.

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