

Creating Partnership?

Or feeling the burden all by yourself?

"The best leaders create partnership"

Where will we and even will we be able to find the leaders we're going to need for the future? It's a common concern for organisation leaders, HR departments, search firms, and perhaps most corners of society. And many current leaders, in fact anybody carrying responsibility, might find themselves awake in the middle of the night, feeling like the world (of the organisation) is weighing heavily on their shoulders. The kinds of challenges we face call out for great leaders and yet they seem to be in short supply. And yet the field of leadership development is changing, with a move a way from individual leadership development and a move towards the notion of "leadership". What kind of leadership will we need? is a very different question and opens the way for different answers.

Dr Peter Hawkins says 21st century Leadership development is much more about collective purpose than individual goals. We have to move on from thinking in terms of leaders and followers, and recognise that leadership requires a third critical component, namely a shared and collective purpose. We need to get more clarity on who our work serves, and then find out (together) what they are going to need from us in the future. It's a move from "I" (how did I do?) to "We" (what are we aiming for?)

And the key concept here is Partnership.

This focus on "we" moves us away from individual performance and seeking out heroic talent and towards building partnerships across the organisation. Leadership fails in the breakdown of such relationships; CEO - Board, Finance - HR, Marketing - Sales, Senior Leadership - Middle management - ultimately, "me and you". And so the leadership challenge is to create a greater sense of partnership. Barry Oshry, author of power and Systems and creator of the Organisation workshop describes it like this:

Partnership is "a relationship in which we are jointly committed to the success of whatever endeavour, process, or project we are engaged in."

That sentence takes some chewing over. It invites us to consider our working relationships (and others too) and consider what level of commitment exists between the parties. Is there a "we" here? and are "we" jointly committed to the same successful outcomes? According to Jane Sigford writing up Dennis Cheesebrow's work on "Partnership Redefined", Partnership is "a key for unleashing the latent creativity and ownership that remains largely untapped in most organisations and it is also a strategy for reducing stress and increasing performance at the same time". Partnership for Oshry is reciprocal. It means "being a person who sees others—who grasps why they are and what is important to them, who gets behind them and helps move them ahead in their world, as well as being a person who puts your projects out to others—who lets them know who you are and what is important to you, who allows them to get behind you and move you ahead in your world." This chimes with Stephen Covey's idea that the 8th Habit (to follow the first 7) is all about finding your voice and helping others to find theirs.

Sigford notes that Partnership is a mutual decision to suspend authority and hierarchy, to interact as peers who are committed to making each other and the organisation successful. She asserts that Partnership is not a relationship among equals; rather it is a relationship of shared leadership across differences in authority.

The Power Lab - aiming for Partnership

Barry Oshry created the now famous "Power Lab" where executives go away for a week to take part in a simulation where everyone is assigned different organisation roles (Top, Middle, Bottom etc) and often turns into something of a social experiment. Without help, Partnership is elusive and factions and breakdowns regularly occur. In the one day version, the Organisation Workshop gets to the heart of partnership in organisation life – why partnership is critical to organisational success, what gets in the way of it developing, and the role of leaders in making it happen. Here, participants are given a whole new lens for seeing, understanding and moving past the roadblocks to success. They are dropped into roles as top executives, middle managers, workers and customers interacting in a fast-paced environment, experiencing situations that regularly occur in these positions. Very quickly it all becomes real – just like what they face day-to-day. In combination with these engaging, high-energy activities, there are practical strategic frameworks based on the work of Barry Oshry. These frameworks help participants make sense of what they're learning and enable them to connect to experiences in their own organisations. The application activities help keep the lessons alive once participants are back at work.

Partnership: A Recapitulation (Dennis Cheesebrow)

Partnership is based on trust in the competence of self & others

Partnership is not an alternative to hierarchy but a different view of how hierarchy works in a human organisation.

Partnership maximizes human potential

Partnership means adopting a different attitude toward time

Partnership means a willingness to change your mind & the plan

Partnership is an ongoing commitment, not a one-time experiment

So what does it take to be a good partner?

The biggest shift has to be in terms of mindset. Am I thinking (and concerned about) about my own performance or that of the whole team, or organisation? What level of joint commitment are we experiencing here and how can we increase it?. People are more likely to own something that they have helped to create than something they are simply asked to implement or comply with. As Oshry puts it, the goal is to: ***be a leader who creates responsibility throughout the system (rather than sucking up responsibility and holding it alone).***

It doesn't mean the leaders who create partnership will no longer wake in the middle of the night, feeling burden and anxiety for the future. What it does mean, however, is that they won't be the only ones lying awake. Partners who care about the same outcome will be feeling the same concern and sharing responsibility for doing whatever it takes to turn breakdown into breakthrough, to turn what feels like failure, into what looks like success.

Quote Unquote

"When we are blind, we don't know that we are blind and we think we see; and we take whatever we see as a truth and then we act" Barry Oshry

"Don't be strong. Be weak. Unclench your fists. Dare to be vulnerable. Honest weakness takes courage,"
Author and Pastor, Pete Greig

"You have to take a stand... and then stand there" Daniel Ellsberg

"Leadership is a poison, unless we have the antidote in our hearts" Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi (adapted)

'Being able to change your internal state might be one of the most powerful techniques you learn in becoming an effective leader— one who inspires others to learn, adapt and perform at their best.' Boyatis