

Develop perspective as a LEADER

Why perspective matters and how to shift yours.

Imagine an art class in which the students are all painting a 'still life'. A large bowl of fruit is placed upon a glass tabletop, bananas, kiwis, apples, oranges, all piled high and spilling out over the edges. At the end of the art class, brushes are placed upon palettes and the students walk around the class looking at each other's productions. The easels have been set up around the bowl of fruit and they now circle the canvas pictures assessing each other's representations. What do they see?

Indeed, each artist has painted a bowl of fruit. But is it the same? Some have included different fruits; some have painted a large decorative heart on the side of the fruit bowl. Some have included a cascade of grapes and others have not. In their circle surrounding the bowl of fruit, they each saw a different perspective and painted what they saw. The bowl had a heart design only on one side. The grapes were only visible from another.

What if that bowl of fruit is everything that

we experience in our lives? The question isn't whether what we are seeing and experiencing is real – the question is whether it provides the whole picture. Are we missing anything? Can someone else see something we cannot?

What if one artist positioned themselves underneath the glass table?

This is the first fundamental attribute of leadership: To recognise that perspective changes depending on from where you are viewing the situation.

The follow-on attribute is the ability to recognise that as a leader, you have the ability to be mobile in your perspective, and one of your key roles is to leverage this mobility in order to see, understand and appreciate different perspectives. I refer to these as your leadership 'Vantage Points' and these can be distilled into five key opportunities to see things holistically. Building in mobility between these vantage points is key to leadership effectiveness and helps not only with decision making by providing fuller information, but aids communication and clarity for a community or team which is a specific role for any leader.

The five vantage points to cultivate are:

IN AMONGST

This vantage point could be described as 'back to the floor'. As a leader regularly participating alongside people carrying out the work of the team enables you to experience what it is like, what could work better and what gets in the way, so you are able to resolve challenges and optimise the experience for others.

TO THE SIDE AND AROUND

This is an opportunity for leaders to observe the working level of any team or group but not be in active participation. So, to notice how people engage and work with each other, how hand-offs between teams are working with fluidity or otherwise and to understand the culture and clarity of the working situation. This might

be similar to the practices of 'Management by walking about' introduced by theorists in the late 20th century.

FROM HIGH ABOVE

This is a unique vantage point for a leader who has the opportunity to see across various working teams and groups and to notice join ups, cross departmental working and information sharing. In addition, leaders will often find themselves in meetings where they are networking with other leaders across a larger system. This is an opportunity to see things from a wider perspective. Imagine if you are at the top of a tall building – you can see how this road junction joins with another and where a traffic jam might originate in the flow of city streets.

When you are at ground level you cannot see that or anticipate a problem until it is upon you. Imagine our bowl of fruit viewed from above – the form, shape and dimensions would be completely different.

FROM HIGH ABOVE AND BEYOND

Again, from a higher position instead of looking straight down and into my team or my group or organisation, I have the vantage point here of looking broadly at the landscape perspective. I can see what competitors might be doing, I can see upcoming trends and I can see and anticipate potential opportunities and threats. This could be the leader reading, attending conferences, gaining perspectives from prospective customers or employees.

INSIDE

The final vantage point is within. Each and every leader has their own experiences, intuition, and point of view. Providing sufficient time to make sense of any of the other vantage points and consider how to communicate, respond with clarity, notice, and deal with emotion so this is channelled effectively and not reactive

are all opportunities provided by the vantage point of 'Inside'. Imagine yet again our bowl of fruit, with the lens of individual intuition – some may draw a literal picture, others may draw an interpretation.

The challenge and opportunity for any leader – or indeed any professional working in a human context – is to be mobile between each of these vantage points on a regular basis – challenging what we can see from one vantage point to the other and building as far as we can, a holistic picture. It is important to notice where we may have preferences (e.g., an introvert leader may spend more time 'inside' and 'from high above and beyond' but not sufficient time gaining the perspective of 'In amongst').

a leader who rose up through an organisation they are deeply familiar with may be stuck 'in amongst' because it is safe and familiar rather than gaining a wider systemic perspective).

So, given these different

Vantage Points why is this important? Because imagine as a leader our critical role is to create clarity and to inspire others to collaborate and move us towards our shared endeavour. The more we can see the holistic picture, the better able we are to understand if we have clarity together and how we can best enable and support each other to work collectively and with the human characteristics of creativity, self-starting, innovation, and productivity. ■

PAULA LEACH has over 25 years' experience in HR, most notably as Chief People Officer at The Home Office and Global Chief People Officer at FDM Group. She now runs her own business, Vantage Points Consulting, and is the author of *Vantage Points: how to create a culture where employees thrive*.



FROM THE UK

BY PAULA LEACH

Previously Chief People Officer at The Home Office and Global Chief People Officer at FDM Group. She now runs her own business, Vantage Points Consulting