

Management vs Leadership

Bertrand Piccard

People today are fed up with being managed and *told* what they should believe, instead of being *led* with a vision. Politicians all too rarely treat their constituents as thoughtful, intelligent individuals that can make considered decisions. It's in part why politics has become so divisive. Citizens are looking for leaders with long term visions that will explain their ideas - the opportunities and the challenges - and will motivate them to build a better future. Significant change, in any field or form, can only be achieved if people are included and brought in as part of the solution.

During a visit to the NASA space center in 1962, President Kennedy noticed a janitor sweeping one of the corridors and asked him what it was that he did there. The man replied that he was helping to put a man on the moon. He felt that he was contributing to something much bigger than himself, a mission set out by his country's leader a year before. It's exactly this state of mind that I tried to reproduce at Solar Impulse. Not a single member of the team was only welding electric cables or gluing pieces of carbon together, they were all trying to prove that renewable energy and clean technologies can change the world.

This is the difference between management and leadership. The manager tells people *what* to do, and how, while the leader explains *why* they should do it. Both are important, but only true leadership will move people by giving them a meaning and purpose within a larger context.

It is a notion of leadership that is lacking in our political discourse. This past year has seen voters make unexpected choices in both the UK and United States. Decisions that I don't believe were borne out of inspiration, but rather frustration. Someone who feels like they are not listened to or understood, who feels they are taken for a fool, will react in the ballot box. It's no surprise that populism is on the rise almost everywhere.

To solve the challenges of our time, we are going to need leaders that can inspire us toward grander visions. Below are four qualities that our political authorities should develop in order to become leaders.

1. Listen to others

Any success I have enjoyed has been the result of a team effort. Listening to others - and really listening, not just waiting for your turn to speak as can be the case with much of politics – gives them a stake in your shared success, and they will share valuable insight and expertise that will help us all to succeed.

It's a two-way street, though. Had I not remained true to my original vision, then the team would not have been forced to go beyond their assumptions and create new solutions to solve our problems.

2. Bring others on the journey

To lead, you must first motivate others to follow you. For instance, people understand that nowadays not only is it possible to get rid of our dependency on fossil fuels, it also makes a lot of sense to create jobs, generate profits and boost the economy.

For people to rid themselves of the dogma that we must burn fossil fuel to grow our economy, we must demonstrate how to get there. People want to be treated intelligently and will accept that any significant change will be a journey, one that is worthwhile – or else why would we do it – and challenging. If it was easy, it would have already been done.

3. Take the long view

Many of our political systems are blighted by the need for politicians to succeed in the short-term as their main business is basically to be elected each cycle. It's not surprising then that it has become so divisive and populist.

We need leaders that will explain their ambition, why we should get there, and stand behind it. That is, after all, what motivated people to offer support in the first place. My guess is that most people are ready to put in a lot of effort and work hard for a goal if they understand its purpose.

4. See the big picture

When Henry Dunant created the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863 after witnessing the Battle of Solferino, he ushered in a more humane notion of warfare that offered greater protection to soldiers and civilians. When Kennedy promised to “[land a man on the Moon and return him safely to the Earth](#),” he set in motion a program that revolutionized science.

What could be next? The programs below could federate everyone with enthusiasm around a common goal and creating a global movement:

1. 1) the worldwide implementation of clean technologies that at once protect the environment and create jobs and profit;
2. 2) in education, allowing everyone access to better jobs;
3. 3) in health, to improve quality of life and reduce social insurance burdens;
4. 4) the eradication of poverty, as a moral imperative as well as for security reasons.

Take energy policy for example. For more than a few decades now, it's as if we have been in a bathtub with a leak. Instead of fixing the leak and being more efficient with the resources available, we have just left the tap running, keeping the bath full. It is high time that we solved this problem, and [my next adventure](#) will be focused on just this.

Basically, think big. We need more moon shots to change society and the world.