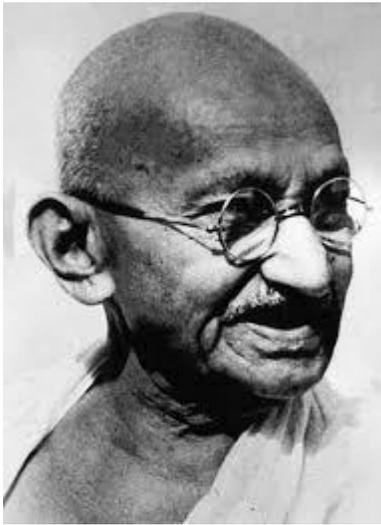


On LEADERS and LEADERSHIP



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I was recently referred to an organisation by a friend. They asked whether I wanted to get involved in a leadership program with adolescents in my home country. They first wanted me to pen my thoughts on leadership, however, which is a challenging task in itself, considering the plethora of varied views on this topic.

Where to start? Perhaps by visiting renowned authors on the topic like Tom Peters, Robin Sharma, and Tim Collins; or studying the lives of prominent historical leaders like Nelson Mandela, Joan of Arc, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan or Queen Victoria. We could follow blogs of present-day leaders like Angela Merkel, Barak Obama, Richard Branson or IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde, or, given a bit more time, examine research papers from esteemed academic institutions; such as Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge etc.

...Or we can just Google 'leadership' – which is what I did, and this is what I found:

To Lead:

- to show the way to a group of people, animals, vehicles, etc. by going in front of them
- to lead a group of moving people or vehicles is to walk or drive in front of them
- to take someone somewhere, by going with them⁴

Leader:

- a person in control of a group, country, or situation
- People in charge of or controlling other people⁵

¹ https://www.wpclipart.com/famous/political/England/Queen/Queen_Victoria_painting_BW.png.html

² <https://pixabay.com/vectors/man-person-face-black-mandela-156732/>

³ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohandas_K._Gandhi,_portrait.jpg

⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lead>

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/leader>

Now you don't have to have to have a Ph.D. on the topic to spot the presenting problem. The verb contains words like: *show the way, going in front of them, to take someone... by going with them*, while the noun describes a person *in charge of or controlling* people.

But more on this later.

True to the task given to me, however, I am writing this article from my own perspective, having led others (along with the mistakes I have made), having studied leadership on a continuous basis, and from consulting to various organisational leaders as a Professional Coach over the past 15 years.

My earliest personal recollection of a leadership position was on the student council at high school. This was no mean feat for me in light of my undiagnosed ADHD and propensity to speak too much in class; meaning I was no hot favourite amongst the teachers. In hindsight, though, I realise I did have two factors in my favour. Firstly, we were a class size of 34 pupils and of those 16 needed to be elected to the council. Thus a 50/50 change. Secondly, I was six-foot-tall, and according to American folklore, fake news or actual research – depending which you may want to call it, tall men are more likely to be chosen as male leaders.

After school I served as a military officer and then training as a church minister, (I think that was Creator's why to humble me – believe me nobody gets more flack that a church minister).

From thereon I fulfilled various leadership roles in business organisations and continued to apply myself to see how I could best develop others to live to their full potential.



My passion to see others succeed and become the best they can be inspired my ongoing studies and postgraduate qualifications in behavioural sciences, leadership and coaching. I was fortunate to learn from internationally recognized sages of the coaching fraternity, like the late Prof. Mike van Outshoorn,⁶ as well as Dr Bruce Peltier. I found mentors in Prof Daniel Louw and my current supervisor Dr Hugo Theron, where I find enormous value guiding me in my work as a Leadership Coach working globally with leaders in various industries. I also believe that I have had the privilege to learn just as much from my clients as they have from me as their Coach.

I am brought back to the dilemma I had with our earlier definitions of Leading (to lead) and Leader: if I look at the verb which describes what leaders do, it says that **they show the way, (go) in front of them,... take someone... by going with them**. So, I guess the first thing is that the leader needs to know the way him/herself. Then it describes how to lead or take others on that way, **by showing the way, going in front, or going with his/her followers**. This to me is a

⁶ <https://mike-vanoudtshoorn.muchloved.com/>

sharp contrast to the noun which refers to **controlling or taking charge**. Of course, we do understand that in some cases this is very much needed; like in an emergency situation or for a pressing deadline. Sadly, however, this style of leadership has become the fallback position for many leaders in their day to day operations. We see that In **Charge and Controlling** is often the approach taken up by leaders who jostle for position, power or prestige – or simply have not learned the art of leadership and empowering others; whereas **show the way, going in front of them, to take someone... by going with them** describes those whose aim it is to serve the people they lead. This touches on the higher virtues needed for effective long-term leadership, which we will get to shortly.

When I am commissioned to coach leaders in organisations, I have the privilege of working with technical experts in the fields of IT, Finance and Engineering, to name a few. These leaders need no upskilling on strategy, project management or goal execution – you cannot fault them on academic knowledge in their fields, nor the application thereof. The reason I am invited to partner with these leaders is where the art of leadership impacts their ability to achieve their goals through their teams. It is not uncommon to find technical experts promoted to leadership roles where they hold a title without the behavioural competencies to lead effectively.

With such clients, I go back to my Google definition and ask the following questions:

1. Does my client know **the way him/herself** in order to be able to show others the way? – And to what extent?
2. Does my client know how to **show others the way?** – And to what extent?

To me, that is leadership: **the art of effectively taking followers on the journey towards a predetermined end destination**. To hold a title does not make you the leader; leading effectively makes you a leader.

After many years of coaching others, studying and doing research in the field and from my own experience and mistakes, being an effective leader boils down to the following 4 aspects. I am not sure that the Gurus in the field, the ghosts of passed leaders or the Professors of the Ivy League Universities on the US east coast will agree, but that then was not my assignment.



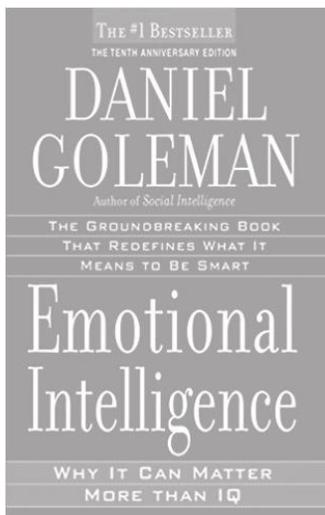
I have to note that this view was primarily influenced by a far greater and a more German philosopher than I, Heidegger⁷, who spoke of the four dimensions of human experience - Umwelt (environment), Mitwelt (world with others), Eigenwelt (personal world) and a spiritual dimension (Uberwelt).⁸This led me to formulate the 4 aspects that I think leaders should focus on- **to know how to show** their followers the way.

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Heidegger-German-philosopher>

⁸ Chris Mace, (2003). Heart and Soul: The Therapeutic Face of Philosophy: Routledge, Chapter 13: Existentialism and existential psychotherapy: Emmy van Deurzen

They are: Physical Wellbeing, Social (or relational) Skills, Emotional Intelligence & Cognitive Awareness and Spiritual Virtues.

1. Physical Wellbeing: by physical I mean that a leader should look after his or her own physical wellbeing to the best of their ability (knowing that we do not all have the same capabilities). We know the adage 'healthy body, healthy mind'. Researchers have proven that people who are tired, overworked, stressed and unhealthy cannot lead effectively.
2. Social (relational) Skills: as mentioned earlier, leaders need to **take others** along the way; thus interpersonal skills are key. This does not mean that being a leader means being a conversationalist, extrovert or necessarily "the life and soul of the party". He/she does need to understand people, how they think, feel, what they believe and how they are best motivated. Communication ability is of cardinal importance, as is the ability to build rapport with his/her followers. For this a leader needs a well develop EQ (emotional intelligence). Yes, it is buzz word (or concept) of today but then this a fundamental skill if you want to work, communicating and motivating others. To understand this a leader must be self-aware with the ability to self-regulate in order to function efficiently. Daniel Goleman broke this down further it five abilities or competencies. In his book Working with Emotional Intelligence⁹ Daniel Goleman breaks down the concept of EQ into five attributes: ¹⁰



- i. Self-awareness – the ability to know one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and goals and recognize their impact on others while using gut feelings to guide decisions.
- ii. Self-regulation – involves controlling or redirecting one's disruptive emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances.
- iii. Social skill – managing relationships to move people in the desired direction
- iv. Empathy – considering other people's feelings especially when making decisions
- v. Motivation – being driven to achieve for the sake of achievement

Additionally, it is important to note that the leader needs to maintain his/ her own healthy family, social and business relationships. The old myth of 'leave your problems

⁹ <https://www.amazon.com/Emotional-Intelligence-Matter-More-Than/dp/055338371X>

¹⁰ Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam Books

at home when entering the office space' is precisely that – a myth. Uneasy or volatile relationships take up a lot of headspace, even if suppressed to the unconscious mind.

3. **Mental Health and Awareness: What do we mean by Mental Awareness?** This is the ability of a leader to be aware of his/her own cognitive biases knowing that his/ her worldview will have a significant impact on his/her decision-making. Knowing how to acknowledge this and adapt this, when needed.

On mental health much has been written, I think it is safe to say that effective leaders learn how to deal with their emotions successfully. The most common of which is stress, anger, doubt and believe it or not insecurity.

4. **Spiritual Virtues:** these do not have relate to religion, but rather to virtues like humility, kindness, patience, honesty, courage and the like. An atheist can own these virtues equally well as a believer. Of these, I believe that courage is one of the most important virtues for successful leadership, because it is courage that we need most when we need to be humble and admit when we are at fault, or even be humble when we are right. When others grieve us, we still need to act with kindness. When something personal is at stake, we need to not compromise on honesty for fear of losing status, approval, money or even our jobs.

True leaders live spiritual virtues; they don't just hang them on office walls or add them to their online social profiles.

These, then, are my thoughts on leadership. If a leader possesses and continually grows in these four areas, he or she will do well. Such a leader can live what Google told me: **showing the way, going in front of them, taking someone... by going with them**¹¹

Although I mainly work with adults and sometimes with teens, I believe that they count equally for leaders of all ages, six, sixteen or sixty.

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¹¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lead>