

The Essence of Leadership

by Andrzej Gorecki (Andrew Gorecki), March 2013

In 2011 Werner Erhard and Michael Jensen published the results of their research into leadership. Having spent the last 30 years searching for clarity in the same space myself, I can testify that theirs is the best model of leadership I have ever come across.

Post learning about Erhard's and Jensen's work I have been busy applying their model within the company I work for. But, I couldn't resist doing something else: to analyse how their model applies to a country, specifically to Australia.

Many frustrated Australians would agree that successive governments have consistently failed to lead the country, resulting in Australia lingering somewhere within the top 20 countries, instead of being on the top by most measures. And, to make the matter worse, we wouldn't have even stayed within the top 20 if it wasn't for our immense wealth, stemming from owing the entire continent, full of natural resources. We are definitely a lucky country, but for decades now we have been squandering this good fortune, wandering like a rudderless¹ ship.

So, let's have a look at some key Australian politicians. Erhard and Jensen's model identifies three core components of leadership:

- Integrity,
- Authenticity, and
- Commitment to something greater than oneself.

If any of these components is missing or is flawed, the person will be ineffective as a leader.

It is important to notice that whilst the model applies to leadership in the traditional sense, it is also highly relevant to leading one's own life.

Let's examine the three pillars of leadership and use them to make a high level assessment of the leadership qualities of Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott. I have included Mr

Rudd, as many Australians still consider him an alternative leader for the Labor party, although I struggle to see how anyone could take him seriously as a potential prime minister. We elected him once and he disappeared. If we ignore the comments his colleagues have made (depicting him as a bad and useless person) and elect him again, what's the guarantee that the Labor Party machine won't use him once more, just to get into power and then install someone else to lead the country?

Anyway, let's look at the three key Australian politicians, starting with integrity.

Integrity

Integrity is the simplest element of leadership (which doesn't mean that it is easy). The individual needs to follow a simple protocol:

- If you cannot deliver, don't promise.
- If promise, do whatever you can to deliver.
- If you fail to deliver, accept the responsibility. Fix it or compensate, but definitely apologise.

To state the obvious, Kevin and Tony have been acting with integrity; Julia hasn't. She could still eat a humble pie and apologise for doing what she has promised not to, but I don't think that her hubris would ever let her do this. The lack of integrity disqualifies Julia Gillard as a leader.

Authenticity

This element of leadership is difficult. It is about saying what one really thinks. It also means saying it when it may not be convenient or advantageous to do so. It is about accepting that at times we won't look good and will lose people's admiration by saying what we need to say.

Erhard and Jensen assert that at times we are all inauthentic and that this is a part of being human. But, a leader must be authentic about his or her inauthenticity – call it conscience if you wish. A leader must be aware of his or her occasional inauthenticity.

Most of us lack such awareness. We have a burning inner need to look good; for example

¹ Note: pun not intended. I genuinely meant a missing rudder, not missing Kevin Rudd.

we believe in and assert our loyalty when there is none, simply because we fear the loss of other peoples' admiration.

Is Julia Gillard authentic? She did claim to be loyal to Kevin Rudd and then took his job. Then, is she at least aware about being inauthentic? Hard to say, but in public she surely gives an impression that as far as she is concerned, there was no issue of disloyalty there.

Then, what about Kevin Rudd or Tony Abbott? They both say too many politically correct things to be considered really authentic. They seek admiration from all the sections of the community, irrespective of the fact that the various social groups don't have the same set of values, don't contribute at the same level to our society, and even have different levels of loyalty to Australia.

This ever-increasing political correctness creates breeding ground for people such as Pauline Hanson, who have little to offer, but are prepared to say things that everyone knows to be correct, yet no politician in the mainstream parties would dare to say.

In my assessment, all three politicians have deficiencies as far as authenticity is concerned, although it is obvious that Julia Gillard scores the lowest.

Commitment to Something Greater

Doing what one promises and stating the truth when required rather than just when convenient are important pre-requisites to being a leader. However, without pursuing goals that would benefit others more than oneself there can be no real leadership.

Do our three top politicians have such goals? If they do, they are not telling us. To an external

observer it looks like Julia Gillard just wants to stay in power at all costs. Kevin Rudd would like to regain power and I presume punish those who were disloyal to him. Tony Abbott just wants to stop the damage being done to the country and reverse some of it, if possible. This is significantly better than Labor, but not sufficient to change the fortunes of our country.

Summary

The above reflections give us an understanding as to why Tony Abbott has such a lead over Julia Gillard, but would have a harder job winning against Kevin Rudd, even so badly damaged by his own colleagues last year.

Both Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott score similarly when assessed using the three pillars of leadership. They have integrity, a similar degree of authenticity (lacking at times), and no commitment to something truly bigger than themselves. Beliefs in 'liberal values' or 'labour values' mean little in the absence of a grand vision for Australia.

This is why when selecting the next prime minister of Australia we won't have an obvious choice. We can only select the better of the two quite uninspiring 'more of the same' alternatives.

If Tony Abbott wanted the choice to be obvious and unquestionable, if he wanted to ensure a massive electoral win this year and many terms in government, he should be telling us where he wants to take Australia over the next 10-20 years. A great and inspiring vision is the missing element which prevents Tony from being seen as a strong leader; a true statesman. This is something our country needs badly - and when it comes, it won't be even a minute too soon.