

The new bosses

Leadership will hinge, as never before, on good manners and genuine respect for others



NOW'S THE TIME: Consultant Tony Manning argues here that modern business leaders need to understand that manners maketh management

LEADERS can only be as great as others let them be. Too many people in high office seem to think that their titles or roles make them special.

They think that because they are in charge they have an infinite ability to make others do as they wish.

They imagine that the trappings of power make them powerful, that everything they say carries clout, and that all their decisions make sense to everyone around them.

Confidence is a critical factor in an executive but it needs to be rooted in an ability to get results by bringing out the best in others, not by lording it over them.

Confidence should never be confused with arrogance, which is a disgusting trait.

South Africa has a tragic history of diminishing people, not just black people or women or those with disabilities.

Across the board, individuals with ambition, enterprise, ideas, enthusiasm and energy have been held back, frustrated, insulted, underestimated and short-changed.

They have been told what to do, rather than listened to. They have been controlled rather than inspired. They have been treated as incompetent halfwits, rather than as capable and intelligent individuals.

And they have been pushed into confrontational relationships by the very people who should have been winning their hearts and minds.

Yet for half a century the "human resources school of management" has evangelised the importance of people.

Twenty years ago, US and European companies started copying Japanese management practices which emphasised the importance of what is now called "human capital". Today there is a new recognition of the value of people.

In the last decade, technology clearly played a huge role in boosting productivity. But around the world, smart executives are unleashing the imagination and human spirit to push the boundaries of corporate performance.

Organisations are discovering that how-

ever well they performed in the past, extraordinary changes and improvements are still possible when they tap the human potential within their walls.

Everywhere, people are working smarter. Ideas are bubbling up from the most unexpected quarters. Innovation has become everybody's business. Frontline service has become vastly better than it ever was — even though many of the same people still deliver it.

If the 1990s was a time of astonishing technological progress, this decade will see human beings back on top of the performance agenda.

The first wave of productivity gains — through re-engineering, downsizing, outsourcing, and so on — is past. Now firms must find new ways to do better in business

conditions that are much worse.

In the 21st century, leadership will hinge, as never before, on good manners and genuine respect for others. These soft factors deliver hard results.

They apply both within organisations and outside, with all stakeholders.

After all, suppliers, customers, government and the rest are not just legal bodies, nameplates, or amorphous masses; they are made up of human beings with needs and feelings, hopes and fears.

Treat those people well, and you immediately stand out as being different and nicer to work with; treat them badly, and they'll get you.

No company is a social club. Not every business conversation is pleasant.

Leaders have to say no, have to take hard

decisions, and have to pressure people to perform. But the way they do these things will turn people on or off — possibly forever.

Good manners are a personal choice. But no company can allow its employees to get away with being bad mannered. Their behaviour impacts widely. It sends strong messages about an organisation and its values.

It is an integral part of a firm's identity, its reputation and its brands — all of which are increasingly important. Good manners should be seen as a strategy, rather than a happy accident.

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