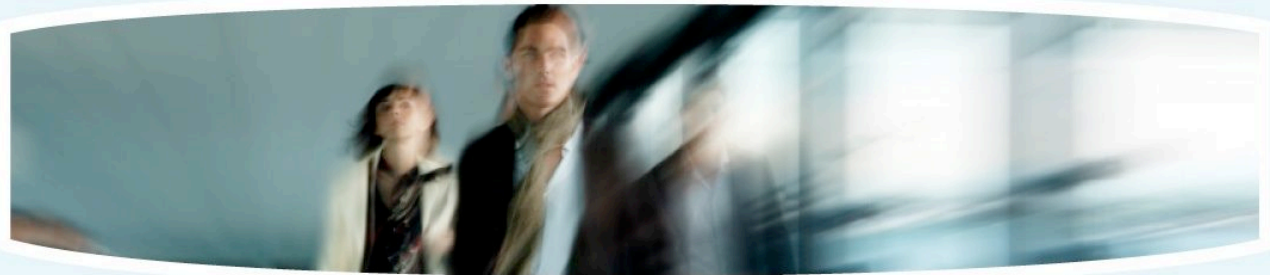




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By Keith Coats

The Inconvenient Truth for Leaders

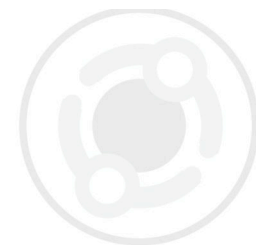
Attention leaders - Control is an illusion.

Article at a glance

What global warming is to Al Gore, so is the issue of control to the leader. However the inconvenient truth is that control is an illusion. Keith Coats, global leadership guru explores the concept of leadership and control in this insightful article on invitational leadership.

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A powerful lesson that sits invitingly like a precious gem awaiting discovery is that in life, as in leadership, the issue is not control, but rather one of dynamic connectedness.

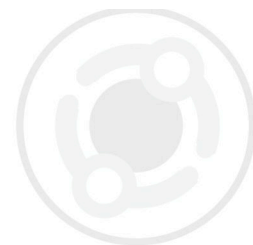
You are not in control.

What global warming is to Al Gore (and hopefully the rest of the planet), so is the issue of control to the leader. However, the inconvenient truth is that control is an illusion. In its broadest sense the notion that we can control our lives is a fallacy. The harsh reality is that the only thing we can take control over is our response to whatever the stimuli or situation we happen to encounter. Those deliberate goals we articulate to help shape our future, goals that provide a measure of purpose and control over the uncharted terrain ahead, can be rendered meaningless in an instance. Uncontrollable factors: from cancer to a collision; from a revolution to an economic collapse. Point is, we are simply not in control as to what happens next.

This understanding of reality is scary for those who have come to assume the opposite. It flies in the face of what has been the bedrock of our understanding as to what constitutes good management and popular notions of leadership. The French and Italian words manège and maneggio that form the roots for our word 'management' embody the imagery of riding a horse, of being in control. Managers, we were taught, needed to lead, plan, organise and control. But as the mechanical metaphor of how we see the world and understand the design of organised work gives way to a new ways of seeing and understanding both the world, and the world of work, the idea of control has to change. For most leaders, accustomed as they are to understanding leadership being in control, such a change represents the Mount Everest of paradigm shifts.

Leaders who operate from the notion that they are in control work from the assumption that the world is a predictable place; a world were tomorrow will resemble today. They also would believe that they, due to their seniority and experience, have more to contribute than others. A leader leads and workers work kind of mentality prevails. They would believe that they have the answers and that others expect them to know what is going on, take charge and provide security. They assume responsibility on behalf of others, a belief that is fertile soil for the growth of an autocratic, driver type of style that if you disapprove of, well...you know what to do! The sad thing is that all too often the others in such an equation have been conditioned to simply abdicate their personal and collective authority and responsibility and so are happy to default to the Leader. After all, it means that there is always someone else to blame.

But the inconvenient truth for leaders is that as the future is navigated, control is not what defines leadership. Within a Quantum understanding of the Universe, a powerful lesson that sits invitingly like a precious gem awaiting discovery is that in life, as in leadership, the issue is not control, but rather one of dynamic connectedness. In the emerging Connection economy, the leader's ability to connect and invite the best out of others in contributing to the overall purpose will



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be the benchmark of quality leadership.

To understand the implication and challenges of what is required, leaders will need to reframe what they believe about leadership. Inviting participation, 'Invitational Leadership' to give it a name, differs in philosophy, assumption, attitude and behaviour from the take charge, command and control leadership mould to which we have become accustomed.

Invitational leaders believe that...

... others have something worthwhile to contribute and that, given the right environment, would choose to make that contribution as opposed to not contributing.

... that leadership is best thought about as character and behaviour rather than role and function.

... chaos is a necessary part of life and that order without control is not only possible, but is the natural way in a world which is connected

Invitational leaders assume that...

... the sum of the whole outweighs the sum of the parts

... if they ask the right questions, the appropriate answers will emerge

Invitational leaders display an attitude that...

... sees the glass as half full rather than half empty

... communicates trust - until you give them a good reason not to

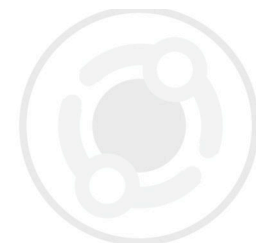
Invitational leaders behave in a way that...

... invites feedback and active participation

... is consistent with who they are and what they believe

Presence has been described as the place where the inner world of the self engages the outer world of action. Presence, as an important characteristic of emotional intelligence, is an indispensable quality of the Invitational Leader. An understanding of both process and presence help negate the need for control. This becomes the new challenge for those who lead in the 21st Century.

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