

Leadership is the fundamental key to success

When Gordon Brown faced the media following Thursday's local election results, which he described as a "bad night for Labour", he said his job now would be "to listen and to lead".

His comments come at a time that 'leadership' is being closely examined – whether it be the leadership demonstrated by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, Boris Johnson or indeed, by our business leaders.

Strong leadership is recognised as being fundamental to success.

Of course, all of us lead in different ways – whether it be at home, at church, in the office or even, just leading ourselves. So let me ask you what kind of leader you think you are. Are you a penguin, a shark, a dog, a rabbit or an owl?

It is my belief that the most important ingredient in an organisation's effectiveness is its leadership. Typically, my day to day life involves working with boards of directors and I have come to the conclusion that effective board leadership is a product of the style and culture of the board leader – quite probably the chief executive – and the individual members of the board. My reckoning is that if you want to improve the effectiveness of the board, board style can be even more important than board competency.

Let me explain some of the typical cultures I have come across. I've simplified the behaviour of the boards into five categories – and although there are aspects of each style that have their merit, I would suggest there is only one that displays effective leadership.

I also concede that circumstances require a particular

culture of leadership – perhaps due to internal pressures (financial maybe) or external pressures (a burdensome regulator for example).

It then occurred to me that each category might be represented by a member of the natural world – and that is where penguins, sharks, dogs, rabbits and owls come into it.

Penguin: This is where all directors are concerned with getting on with each other. No one should be made to feel different or uncomfortable. Indeed, the more alike each member of the board, the more comfortable the board members feel.

Shark: Each director is only there to represent his or her own interest group and they will fight, viciously at times, to have their point of view heard, regardless of the overall mission of the business.

Dog: Directors of this type of board will do as they are told. They are there to rubber stamp what the executive – or dominant chair – has put on the table.

Rabbit: These directors are there to check nothing goes wrong. They have been frozen by the glare of the potential problems that could come about, spending their

time to ensure they do not get themselves into trouble.

Owl: This is the strategic forward-thinking board. Board members do not get involved in the details of the battle. They take a 'helicopter' view of the issues and the opportunities, check on the environment – and then act decisively. As General Sun, the sixth century BC military strategist wrote: "All men can see how the battle is won by the tactics I use. What no man can see is the strategy whereby victory is achieved".

Take a moment to ponder on the recent corporate failures that we have seen or indeed, the recent difficulties that have faced many in public life. What kind of a leader do you think they have been? What kind of a board do you think they have led?

Now consider your work or even your home. Are you the dog (just about agreeing with everything that is proposed) or are you the penguin (doing anything for an easy life and just wanting to be liked)?

Do you tend to only see things from your own perspective and fight for your corner at every opportunity – just like the shark or are you scared to step out in case anything goes wrong – and be caught like the rabbit, in the headlights?

By my reckoning, and based on the boards I have seen, it is those that are personified by the owl that are the most effective: long-sighted, with an aerial view, watching every move, being patient and then acting decisively. The fact that owls are so often regarded as wise may not be coincidental.

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KARL GEORGE

A very early visitor to Birmingham

Let me introduce you to John Grace. Grace was a freelance preacher in the Middle Ages, and by all accounts he was pretty good at it. Crowds flocked to hear his words, despite (or

because of) the fact that they were unorthodox in sentiment and dangerous in doctrine.

I mention the man because he is the first visitor to Birmingham I have yet encountered. He was in the town (or village) in 1424, on his way from Lichfield to Walsall, Colehill and Coventry. Given that we know very little about Birmingham in the 15th Century, John Grace is worth holding onto.

John Grace was an anchorite friar, with a licence to preach issued by the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. More pertinently, though, he was a Lollard. That is, he espoused the beliefs of John Wycliff, whose criticisms of the medieval Church were gaining in popularity in the early 1400s. Wycliff condemned the immense wealth of the church, its corruption and political power, and most particularly the doctrine of the Mass, which he said was not supported by scripture. In short, in contemporary terms, he was a heretic.

Despite its heretical nature, Lollardy found a ready audience in England. Its avowal of a more just and equal society, and reformation of the Church, found



CHRIS UPTON

particular support among the common people in many towns, one of which was certainly Coventry.

Coventry was, in reality, not one town but two, the one belonging to the prior of the cathedral, the other to the corporation, and there was no love lost between them. Criticism of the prior and what he stood for always went down well on the other side of the tracks, and it often ended in fighting. Such was the case in November 1424 too, when John Grace spoke in Little Park on five consecutive days.

The arrival of a seditious preacher was always likely to stir things up. Prior Crosby threatened to deliver a sermon from the pulpit of Holy Trinity church and curse all those who gave an ear to the Lollard. Whether this was true, or an ugly rumour, is uncertain, but it was enough to bring the mob out on the streets, and the prior to confine himself to the priory. Hearing that trouble was brewing, word came from the King's Council to the Mayor, ordering him to keep the peace and to arrest John Grace. The latter was duly taken out and incarcerated in the Tower of London.

Trouble rumbled on for several months afterwards. With the King breathing down his neck, the Mayor felt duty bound to make arrests, and something like 40 Lollard sympathizers were rounded up. They could count themselves lucky; they were only required to pay fines and recant their heresies. By the early 1430s Coventry Lollards were being incinerated.

John Grace's itinerary of sedition, outlined above, is an interesting one, and perhaps a hint as to where Birmingham's affections lay. It's unlikely, if he valued his life, that Grace went anywhere that was hostile to his views. We know that by the 17th Century Birmingham and Coventry were acknowledged hotbeds of radicalism and nonconformity. My guess is that those roots went back a long way. Lollardy was revived and re-born in the 1500s as the Protestant Reformation, which began without (and later with) royal backing. That same process ended up as support for Parliament and the Puritans in the Civil War.

Quite where it all began is another question entirely.

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The longest sulk since Sir Edward Heath

LETTERS: post_letters@mrm.co.uk

Dear Editor, Blame me a little, but, please do not blame the Labour Group of Birmingham City Council as it was really the Government and everyone else to boot, as to why we lost here in Birmingham.

This seems to be the sentiment ("Labour must get its act together, says Sir Albert", *Post*, May 5), coming from Sir Albert Bore as the man who has become the local government equivalent to the late Sir Edward Heath and his long sulk.

Since 2004, we have seen Sir Albert and his group offer our city negative non-cooperation.

Even before 2004, Sir Albert only showed leadership when his authority was questioned by those within his own party and tried to offer an alternative to himself.

This type of party infighting coupled with city negativity does not, and has not, gone unnoticed by the people of Birmingham.

In contrast the Conservative led partnership with the Liberal Democrats under the steady hand of Coun Mike Whitby, has shown how a positive attitude to the people of Birmingham leads to further mandates and the realisation that Birmingham is at the forefront of rejuvenating both the local and nation economy as well as community involvement.

Sir Albert may well think and say "there is a responsibility and I am not going to shirk it". It's just unfortunate that he has done just that and shirked his responsibilities since losing office.

To reflect is good, but, realistically – too little too late.

As his actions have spoken louder than his unmatched words. For these reasons alone the electorate have chosen to continue with a Conservative party that takes pride in presenting a positive

Birmingham, rather than the inactive and negative approach as offered by the current labour group.

PAUL BURKE
Sutton Coldfield

Dear Editor, Regarding: "Labour must get its act together" Sir A Bore (*Post*, May 5). I really think he has lost the plot, in fact the whole of the Labour organisation seems to be living in the dark ages.

Many years ago a very famous female Labour politician finished her address to a Birmingham Chamber of Commerce meeting with the following statement.

"We are not elected to do what you want but to tell you what is good for you."

The sheer arrogance of this statement left everyone speechless and the MP in question had left the meeting before she could be quizzed about such a statement.

It would appear that Sir Albert Bore and Brown are continuing with this policy having forgotten the very basic concept of democracy – that they are elected to represent the people electing them. It would appear to take an election defeat on the present scale to get them thinking.

As Sir Albert Bore says they must get the message of their party across to the electorate. Surely they should be taking note of the very loud message being sent to them by the electorate that their message is not what they want, and the arrogant attitude of Sir Albert Bore that they must teach the electorate about their policies is sheer nonsense, having already spent ten years preaching the same message.

It is time politicians of all parties started listening to what the population of this country want and not what suits their political manifesto.

A P COLESHILL
Coleshill

What do you think? Contact details are at the bottom of the page

Not the good but the harm

Dear Editor, Your correspondent Nigel Bailey ("Few reminders for those who have voted," *Post*, May 3) is quite right; Labour have done some good for Britain in the last 11 years. They have also done a great deal of harm.

In March 2003 they dragged us into an unprovoked and illegal war that has cost, and is still costing, many lives as Iraq is in the grip of civil war. Labour has allowed the creeping privatisation of the NHS, Labour's finest post war achievement.

Labour has encouraged the fragmentation and eventual privatisation of the Royal Mail, the oldest and most efficient in the world, with the closure of thousands of post offices, with hardship for the elderly and disabled.

JAMES BENTON
Birmingham

Food for thought

Dear Editor, The exciting 'rooftop restaurant' suggestion of Alex Wright (*Post*, May 5) recalled my school visit to the London Post Office Tower in the days of public use and I shared his thoughts on how unimaginative the current super-apartments or high office mentality of Birmingham can be.

Allowing for my mild vertigo, coupled with fear of sky-high restaurant prices, there are many examples of popular tourist attractions I've recently enjoyed, which showcase City Breaks.

In Riga, Latvia you can choose from a 27th floor 'Skyline' bar at the Reval Hotel via a glass external lift or the more homely 11th floor 'Star Lounge' at the Albert Hotel.

Both show the UNESCO world heritage old city off in its spectacular views.

For bias and politics, ascend to the top of the Leda Tower, South Nicosia to view the only divided capital in the world and – if you need it – read about

Rail fares in the UK are the highest in Europe and among the highest in the world. Disabled people have had to sell their homes to pay for their upkeep in residential accommodation.

In the run up to the last General Election, Labour promised faithfully that the public would be allowed a referendum on the EU treaty. It was this lie that helped them to power and the same lie that refused us a referendum in 2007, the biggest lie since Ramsay MacDonald betrayed the Labour Party in 1931.

Governments are remembered not for the good they have done, but the harm.

JAMES BENTON
Birmingham

Mowing lawns and CO2 emissions

Dear Editor, In the page 6 brief news items (*Post*, May 5) the salient point about "needing" to mow lawns more frequently was missed.

The mere act of doing so increases carbon omissions, compounding the problem.

I am sure that the compounded problems caused by dealing with climate change are not in the science and hence the calculations.

Extra omissions are created when the flood barriers are erected on the Severn, when there is traffic chaos due to "exceptional" weather.

The clearing up after floods and the manufacturing of replacement furniture and white goods after flood damage and the disposal of the flood damaged goods all add to the environmental damage.

There are endless examples like this so I would suggest we take advantage of the height adjustment available on most mowers and cut some grass less often.

Monty Don would have us use "push" mowers but this is not always practical.

A look at most lawns will reveal that some of it does not get walked or played on.

Interesting shapes can be created adding to the design structure of the garden by leaving the "unused" areas three to four inches long and mowed them say monthly!

The bonus is, as long as the cuttings are collected, herbs and other wild flowers start to emerge and we use our mowers less.

I guess that golfers may be the most resistant to this but they could always call it their bit of rough.

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Council leaders have duty to clean up city politics

There is a weary inevitability about allegations of corruption in Aston, where the banana republic put-down by an Elections Commissioner three years ago continues, sadly, to sum up to many people outside of Birmingham the fragile state of democracy in this city.

Our account today of claim and counter-claim by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, taking in a period of just two months, makes depressing reading. There is no evidence so far of any widespread corruption or ballot rigging in Aston at this year's council elections, but the antipathy between political opponents is so great that huge battles are being fought over the tiniest incident or possible wrong-doing by candidates and their supporters.

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Aston are in denial about their past bad behaviour. This denial takes the form of simply ignoring the findings of two election courts – one in 2005 which uncovered a city-wide Labour plot to rig the postal vote, and one this year which shed light on a highly unpleasant attempt by the Liberal Democrats to concoct evidence in an attempt to convict a Labour councillor of running a smear campaign.

Sir Albert Bore, the leader of the council opposition Labour group, has never accepted the 2005 court judgment by Richard Mavrey QC, despite evidence of ballot rigging that would have been all too obvious to someone of the meanest intelligence. Liberal Democrat MP John Hemming, meanwhile, continues to support his disgraced colleague Coun Ayoub Khan, who was found by this year's election court to have taken part in a "scurrilous" attempt to implicate a Labour councillor in witness intimidation.

Two other major political figures who could bring their influence to bear are Tory council leader Mike Whitby and his Lib Dem deputy Paul Tilsley. Coun Whitby did condemn electoral fraud but as yet there seems to have been little in the way of decisive action to combat this, although Coun Tilsley announced an inquiry into the antics of Coun Khan which has not yet met and shows little sign of doing so.

And away from the claustrophobic atmosphere of Aston, imported village politics from the Indian sub-continent continue to undermine the integrity of elections in Birmingham. There is evidence of the biraderi clan system forcing Asian people to vote in a way dictated by their wider family, yet this is a matter barely talked about by the city's political classes.

The likes of councillors Whitby, Tilsley and Bore have a duty to clean up politics in Birmingham. Their record so far is dismal.

Floods menace

Last year's floods caught everyone by surprise. This year there will be no excuse. We can't predict the weather, but we do know now that there are areas of the West Midlands that are highly susceptible to flooding.

How easy it is to hold back the full force of nature is another question. But undoubtedly there are things that can be done to ensure damage to property and suffering to people is minimised. Whether adequate flood defences have been put in place since last summer is something we will find out next time the waters rise.

What seems absurd, however, is a situation where local authorities have given planning consent for new properties to be built in areas that are known to be at risk of flooding.

According to the Countryside Commission, those in the West Midlands have granted permission for 3,655 houses to be built on floodplains.

No one disputes that there is pressure on the existing housing stock and a need for new property to be built. But what some authorities appear to be forgetting here is that in some cases areas have not been built on for a reason.

A history of flooding may be one of them. We live in a world where climate change is convincing a growing number of people that there is an increased danger of flooding.

Yesterday a group of experts from Durham University published research suggesting we are entering a "flood rich" era.

Against this background, surely it would be wise to reconsider the wisdom of building in areas in which we have had ample and recent evidence of rising water.

Those thinking of buying properties in these places must be told about the insurance issues they may face. If they are not, property developers and local authorities might end up having to defend themselves in court.

Just not cricket

Most parents believe professional cricketers make better role models than football stars, according to a survey.

Talk about damning with faint praise. Could there be any worse role models than stropky, pampered and over-paid footballers?

In any case, for how much longer will England be able to find a cricket team capable of taking on the rest of the world? As the YouGov research makes clear, only one in 10 children now plays cricket at school leaving the future of the professional game more uncertain than ever.

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