

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change

Graham Jenkins discusses the single most important thing you can do to become a more effective leader. It's very simple, but it's not easy.

I have always loved this saying. For anybody who has consciously decided to make some change to their behaviour at some point in their life, this saying resonates strongly. And then there is the other camp. You know, those people who insist that things don't change, a glass is always half empty and you can't rely on anybody to do a job properly? They will always be the kind of person who knows it all but will never be any wiser.

Harsh? It is meant to be. People limit their potential simply by refusing to change the way they look at things. In the world of business leadership, this attitude holds back progress; not just for the leader, but for the entire organisation they lead.

Change is good, bring it on!

We all know that the only one real certainty in life is constant change. So why is it that people who lead companies are often the least likely to change? Of course they are often heard to repeat well worn sentiments like "if we always do what we've always done, we will always get what we've always got".

They are very good at appearing to welcome change. They know it is expected of them and will be seen as a dinosaur if they don't embrace it like they mean it. And many really do believe they want change. They want everybody else in the company to drive change. But not themselves. They do not want to change the way they behave or the way they look at things because many believe they have nothing to learn.

But here's the thing: In medium and small businesses, it is the skills of the CEO, Managing Director or Business Owner that has the largest impact on productivity. And yet so few turn the mirror on themselves when setting strategies to improve the fortunes of their business.

Better leaders create better businesses

In 2007, a joint LSE & McKinsey study highlighted that productivity increases associated with improved management practices are much larger when compared to investment in either Capital or Labour.

Management Matters in Australia carried out a follow up study in November 2009, focusing on the need for better management practices in Australia. This study was specifically for SMEs who often have less formal education or a management network around them to force self-evaluation and develop better skills. It is in smaller organisations and family run businesses where poorer management skills can result in lower productivity.

And here is the simple bit: The moment a business leader realises that they don't have all the answers and it is OK and even enormously constructive to go and seek answers and help from others, is the moment that they instantly become a better leader.

This is when a CEO / Director / Owner truly becomes a leader. They realise that many heads are better than one and you never stop learning and getting better. Being open to that generally makes you a better person to be around as well.

Lonely business executive seeking relationship with others...

Sounds like a lonely hearts column doesn't it? And yet this is the secret to becoming a better leader. Simple yes. Easy? Not for a CEO.

The natural temperament profile for most business leaders includes a tendency to mistrust others. So working together and opening up to others is out of the question right? Sadly, it often is. But a few smart people do seek out Coaches, Business Networks and Expert speakers to help them keep learning and self evaluating. They understand that learning from the experience of others is extremely powerful.

Embedding change and improvement

So here's the really difficult bit: There is no point in surrounding yourself with the best

insight and guidance in the world, unless you are going to do something about it. As busy business people, making a long term change to the way we do things is our most elusive skill. Don't kid yourself you will do it on your own steam. Being open enough to get guidance from others is only half the story. Being brave enough to let them see your progress is the bit that will make all the difference.

If you want to make real changes, make sure somebody you respect knows about what you want to achieve, so they can challenge you. Turning insights and learnings into action, and then being held accountable for those actions, is what turns good 'advice' into tangible change and results in higher productivity. It is what will give you the skills and the drive to cascade better practices through your business.

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