

## Lead by Example? Don't Follow the Leaders!

A disc shaped object appears above Canberra's Parliament House and sits quietly for a couple of minutes. It then disappears. It saw and heard enough – if this is leadership, we'll bring our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to take over planet earth.

I'm not a political "junkie", far from it. With the flood of media coverage concerning the machinations of our "leaders", you cannot help but get dragged into what is happening – after all, the decisions the politicians hand down affect us all in some shape or form.

Politicians are constantly referred to as leaders – the Prime Minister, senior ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and others with the substantial authority of representing and leading us, the Australian people. They may be referred to as leaders but do they truly do justice to the great discipline of leadership? Do they conduct themselves in a manner that befits a leader? As my alien friends found out – not very well.

There has been a lot written about the attitude and broken promises of Tony Abbott and co. But let's not just focus on Tony – there has been far too many terabytes of commentary written about him already. It seems, most politicians the world over behave along very similar lines. Yes, in stark contrast to business leaders, they're constantly scrutinised by radio shock jocks and other media forms, so in many ways, it's difficult to blame them for being a little careful with their words. But careful is one thing, ignoring blatant reality and using "verbal gymnastics" to hopefully smooth over (i.e. fool) the people you serve is something totally different and very wrong and definitely anti-leadership. To be a great leader there are many attributes and we'd need many more words to cover them all here. Lead by example is one of those key leadership attributes but as the following points highlight, don't look at the bulk of our politicians and, for that matter, some of our industry "captains" for that guidance:

1. **Integrity & Genuineness**: With our political class, broken promises abound. It seems that this is a mandatory inclusion in their Position Guides – make promises to get elected and then go ahead and feel free to break them without any need whatsoever to explain why you had to go back on your word. It is probably the biggest issue when it comes to the trust status of our most recent federal governments. There seems to be no motivation or desire to own up to an error of judgement and the reasons for the change in strategy.
2. **Great Role Models**: Snouts in the trough is a well-worn cliché when a conversation turns to politics. "Do as I say and not as I do" is a fallible human condition which is repeated daily in most areas of endeavour. However, with nth degree attention from the media and the public seniority of the role, you'd think a politician would be a little more guarded to ensure they do not stray too far off the righteous path. It seems the temptations are stronger than the leader.
3. **Professional & Respectful**: Really? Listen to any parliament sitting or even some media interviews and watch our alien friend's hairs stand on end when politicians attack each other with the fervour of 1970's school yard bullies. Vile interjections are common place. Even racial and sexual innuendos seem to pass as acceptable. Politicians introduced strict laws against bullying and harassing conduct – yet it seems, this only applies to other workplaces the rest of us work in. Words do matter, no matter what the context or the environment. And the constant negative trashing of ideas, policies and suggestions between the political parties is abhorrent. In business, as a mark of professionalism and respect, a golden rule is not to trash your competition. No such rule with our political leaders.

4. Communicate the Vision: As a leader, you explain in clear and concise language where the business is heading, the vision and the plan to get there. You seek to get buy in so everyone is pulling in the same direction. Very little of that with our current crop of political leaders. Their verbal fluency is good but that alone is useless. The lack of explanation of their vision and strategy seems to be more a case of avoiding scrutiny by revealing as little as possible and hoping no one will notice, including the opposition, the media and the rest of Australia – the people they lead.

It's a shame that our political leadership conduct themselves the way they do – it may be great entertainment, keeping the media busy with “interesting” news stories but, as examples of leadership, we need to look elsewhere. It will be a great day when politicians take an extreme paradigm shift and truly represent their leadership role in public life. Until then, we may need to continue believing in aliens.

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