

Leadership lessons with Mark McCrindle



Mark McCrindle is a social researcher, thought leader and best-selling author. Currently completing his PhD in the area of leadership, he regularly advises leaders, teams and individuals on how to lead in changing times.

(Part 2)

Q. Are there any current or historical leaders that stand out to you as being able to ‘engage’, ‘equip’ and ‘entrust’ they lead?

I see a lot of effective leaders around the place engaging, equipping and entrusting those they lead. What stands out to me is that it’s not all about age. Just because someone is closer in age to this next generation doesn’t necessarily mean they will be better able to engage with them and equip them. It’s those who are innovative, who observe the changes and respond who are [effective at training and equipping the next generation](#). It’s those who

are collaborative; they know that the smartest person in the room is *the room*. They know that the strength of an outcome comes from all of the team members participating rather than just the expert.

That is our whole approach in research. We don't just go to an expert and get the answer, we go to a variety of people, a crowd of experts and across those varied opinions, we get a more holistic answer than if we just went to the expert. That's true in leadership and in life. If we can be collaborative and get the input of each generation or member of the group, we get a better outcome. We become more representative of nuances, of expectations, of our customers or stakeholder base. Which is why that collaborative approach to leading is so essential.

Q. How does trust fit into all of this, all the innovation and being collaborative? And how is trust and authenticity best formed by politicians or by company leaders and executives? How do they gain trust from those around them, particularly when we're in such an uncertain time?

Trust is so key. We've seen over the last few years, with people pushing back on institutions in all their forms. They've pushed back on traditional structures, and it's not that they have no trust in institutions. I don't know that people ever did trust an institution. It's that they have lost trust in the leaders of those institutions. It's a leadership crisis, not a crisis of structure or institution, and it does come back therefore to trust, to authenticity.

Here's another little three-word approach starting with 'R'. We need leaders who are Real. That is about walking the talk and being transparent. Leaders who are responsive to the needs of their teams, who can therefore be team centric rather than leader centric. We need leaders who are relational. If a leader communicates this, people will trust them because they know the leader is not in it for themselves, for their own wins or successes. They're in it for 'us', they're relational, they put 'us' first.

We've seen the outcomes of poor trust in some rogue behaviours in the financial services sector. During the Royal Commission leaders being questioned who should have known better and didn't. Who breached the trust of their organizations, and their stakeholders. The approach we saw from them was they would scramble to give answers rather than being transparent and admitting mistakes. The Commission was famous for these six words, 'Let me show you a document'. People trying to justify how innocent they were and then suddenly there's a document with their signature or name on it, and it's the exact opposite to what they just said. Suddenly they were laid bare and I think that's an example of what we don't want these days. We have to be authentic.

We found in our analysis of Australians that they're a gracious bunch. Aussies will give

someone a break because Aussies know none of us are perfect. And if someone makes a mistake the key response is to own up to it. But then to make amends and move forward. Australians do have limited amounts of grace, they're not going to forgive again and again. But if someone is honest about the mistake they've made or about the approach that didn't work out, and can admit it, then Aussies will give them another go.

We've got a great history of the second chance and sometimes even the third chance, so trust is not about perfection. It's not about getting it wrong but it is about when we do get it wrong, admitting it, owning it, taking the blame and making sure we don't make the same mistake again.

Q. How can leaders own their mistakes in a way that can gain back trust? Because once trust is lost, it's so much harder to get back than if they hadn't lost it at all. Can you unpack that and the importance of leaders owning up to their mistakes and under delivering on promises and saying sorry?

Australians look at what's going on in the heart and what the values are behind it. I think people generally are cynical, there is a fair bit of scepticism out there. People think that organizations are in it for themselves. That leaders are about their own outcomes and that's about it. So if leaders can show they genuinely do put the customer first, they do value the client, that they treat their wellbeing or their success or money the way they would treat their own, then that will come through. Now yes, there might be mistakes made, but people will see that at the heart of it, it is values based. That's what customers now look for. If we don't have those values at the core, it doesn't matter what we say, as I think people will see through that.

Also, if leaders have a longer-term perspective with the big picture in mind, this can help. We say the next generation don't look for a job as much as they look for an opportunity. So, if the leader can see the opportunities and help promote them, that is important.

It was Jack Welch, Head of General Electric for two decades, who said 'Before you're a leader, success is all about yourself. After you become a leader success is all about other people'. Leaders are trying to champion the team outcomes, benefits and individual goals. I say you've got to have a vision for your organization. But you've also got to have a vision for your team members and their own success, that is so key. The true success of a leader is not what they achieve in their lifetime but it's what they set in motion. It's what they set up that goes on, after they have moved to the next role or the next organization that others are carry on. That's what really marks the success of a leader.

The Future Podcast

[Leading the next generation with wisdom ft. Mark McCrindle](#)

Read more..

[How to lead Generation Alpha with Mark McCrindle](#)

[Three ways to lead through change](#)

For more information

If you found this article interesting, download our free [Understanding Generation Z Report and Infographic](#) for more information on how to recruit, train and lead the next generation.

For media commentary contact us on 02 8824 3422 or at info@mccrindle.com.au