

# HONORARY ARTICLE



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*“Good leaders always try to do their best, by making the best choices they can use their talents and skills. Thus, effective leadership is the power of choice. To be able to manage change, commitment is also very important. Leaders should be willing to learn continuously to adapt to this ever-changing environment. Commitment makes people more dependable and responsible. People will trust and respect a leader who keeps their promises and their commitment towards a vision; these leaders are able to inspire their followers more than others.”*

## LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

Leaders are the change agents, who could influence and inspire actions in others and respond with vision and agility during periods of growth, disruption or uncertainty to bring about the needed change (Briscoe Kevin). Though we have taught various theories, concepts, and philosophies on leadership the reality is a little different. Today, we get to experience different types of leaders in many areas such as political, business, academic, social and etc. who need to change their leadership style in the dynamic environment. But some leaders resist change. The concept of the three C's, which are Challenge, Choice and Commitment, will help with managing the resistance to change. Leadership in itself is a challenge because leaders must provide inspiration, develop others, handle different perspectives, lead and guide change, and set goals for their team. Hence leaders are always accountable for successfully achieving the organizational vision. Leadership is a choice; it is the ability to choose and make effective decisions; whether it comes with a title or not.

Good leaders always try to do their best, by making the best choices they can use their talents and skills. Thus, effective leadership is the power of choice. To be able to manage change, commitment is also very important. Leaders should be willing to learn continuously to adapt to this ever-changing environment. Commitment makes people more dependable and responsible. People will trust and respect a leader who keeps their promises and their commitment towards a vision; these leaders are able to inspire their followers more than others. The stories of world leaders have proven this state well with their leaderships, some examples of great leaders in the world are Nelson Mandela, Lee Kuan yew, Mahathir Mohamad, Abdul Kalam, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk. When we study these leaders, their success stories are different from each other.

The political leader, Lee Kuan in his recent speech summarised the past, present and future with the following speech: "A small country like Singapore has zero margins for error. Not just Singapore continued success, but our very survival depends on us having the right leaders. Leaders with integrity, dedication, and competence. Leaders with a conviction to make the tough calls and do the right thing, even if it may cost them some votes. Leaders whom you can trust. We cannot afford any compromise on this. Thankfully for 57 years with three generations we've had leaders who have earned and maintained Singaporean's trust and confidence. Who has worked closely with the people to deliver sound policies, and who has improved all our lives? Never take this trust or this competence for granted. Keep on working hard to find the right people. Get them to serve and help them to do their best for Singapore. It is our duty to extend our success formula to the next generation and beyond. The leadership succession is therefore of paramount importance. When COVID hit us, I put my succession plans on hold. Now we are learning to live with COVID and entering a new normal. The younger ministers have chosen BPM Lawrence Wong to be their leader. I am very happy the matter settled, and my succession plans are moving forward again.

I am also glad that from everything I see, Singaporeans are supportive of Lawrence and his leadership of the team. So, I ask you, to give Lawrence and his 4G team, your team your fullest support. The next few decades would be bracing but exhilarating. I've given you my take on what we can achieve and also what can go wrong. But with your trust, we can come through whatever difficulties awake. With your support, we can turn hopes and dreams into reality. And united as one people, we can secure a brighter future in this uncertain world. Not just for now, not just for ourselves but for every Singaporean child for many generations to come." This speech is one the greatest example to show that leaders are change agents.

Leaders must listen to others and learn about their followers if they wanted to become efficacious leaders. Nelson Mandela is particularly a special case study of a leadership role because he is universally regarded as a great leader across the world. He was the son of a tribal chief. One day he asked himself, how did you learn to be a great leader? To answer this, he decided to attend tribal meetings, from which he remembers two things. First: when his father met with the other Elders they would always sit in a circle; second: his father was always the last to speak. Leadership is choosing a vision, skills, courage, results and outcomes by achieving comparative and competitive advantages. The things around us do not just happen, they are the consequences of different choices. Listening is a continuous lesson to be learned during one's whole life. Mandela practised his father's habit of speaking last.

He observed in boardrooms during meetings, even people who consider themselves good leaders who may actually be decent leaders, would walk into a room and start the conversation with “Here is the problem and here is what I think, but I am interested in your opinion. Let’s go around the room.” Now its too late, the skill to hold your opinions to yourself until everyone has spoken does two things: one it gives everybody else the feeling that they have been heard and contributed, and two the listener gets the benefit it of hearing what everybody else thinks before rendering their opinion. The skill is to keep your opinions to yourself and not respond regardless of if you agree or disagree with what is being said. Simply sit there, listen in and ask questions, so that you can understand what they mean and why they have that opinion. You must try to understand what everyone else is saying to the best of your abilities and then finally you will get your turn. It sounds simple but it is not.

Also, leaders should create a vision, and motivate and inspire others to achieve it. Abdul Kalam is a great example of this. He always believed that “if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and follower.” “Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” Kalam never gave up on any task because to him failure means the first attempt at learning. He trusts that failure will never overtake him and that his determination to succeed is strong enough. He always said that people don’t have equal talent, but all have equal opportunities to develop their talents.

Bill Gates on the other hand is an American business magnate, who is a software developer, investor, philanthropist and co-founder of Microsoft. Scholars believed that he adopted an autocratic leadership style in his early years because he trusts that the best way to manage a team is to control how they work. However, with the current changes in the business world, he himself has changed. Now Bill Gates is regarded as a transformational leader because he is always driven by a strong passion towards innovation and creating change in his own organization and society as a whole. His advice to any leader is “As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others and if your culture doesn’t like geeks, you are in real trouble.” Hence, he believes that “life is not fair; get used to it and to win big, you sometimes have to take big risks.” Jeff Bezos who is CEO of Amazon and the second wealthiest person also is a transformational leader who inspires his team members to achieve more than they thought possible. He always directs his team towards the vision of the organization, and he believes that “Be stubborn on vision but flexible on details.” His motto is “Work hard, have fun and make history.” Jeff confides that “It’s perfectly healthy- encouraged, even- to have an idea tomorrow that contradicted your idea today.” There are two types of companies existing in the world; “those that work to try to change more and those that work to change less. One will be second.” As a leader, he recommends to people, that they always take a long-term point of view. He also said “I think this is something about which there’s a lot of controversies. A lot of people – and I’m just not one of them – believe that you should live for the now. I think what you should do is think about the great expanse of time ahead of you and try to make sure that you are planning for that in a way that’s going to leave you ultimately satisfied. This is the way it works for me. There are a lot of paths to satisfaction, and you need to find one that works for you.”

All these cases show how successful leaders in the world achieved their success even when things never went smoothly. All in all, inspiration, determination, willingness, innovation, dedication, and commitment will help leaders to face the change.