

# 'COURAGEOUS' LEADERSHIP

BY DAVID HOPLEY OBE

## THE LEADERSHIP MYTH

How many times have you heard people say that they have been appointed to or are in a 'leadership role'? I believe this to be one of the great leadership myths. Why? Because no one can appoint you to lead; that decision is yours and yours alone.

Think back to a leader you most admired; someone who influenced you. How would you describe the job they fulfilled? You would probably talk about the appointment or position they held; the role they undertook in that position and their relationship to you (line manager, for example). What drew you to them and impacted on the way they influenced you was not so much what they did day to day, but the manner in which they carried out the role; the values they exhibited in the actions they took.

In an address to newly graduated West Point Officer Cadets, General Douglas MacArthur described a 'true leader' as:

*"...having the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to become a leader, but becomes one by the quality of his actions and the integrity of his intent."*

Think back to those great leaders of the last century, Gandhi; Mandela, Churchill, and you will understand MacArthur's message. It's not what you do, but how you do it that defines your leadership!

## THE LEADERSHIP REALITY

MacArthur noted three important traits required of true leaders; confidence; courage; and compassion. I believe these are important, but are part of what I term the act of *Courageous Leadership*. Or, put another way, leaders who are Committed; Authentic; Trustworthy; Compassionate; and act with Humility (CATCH). Whilst inextricably linked, each requires an action on our part – that is if we are, in MacArthur's words, to be 'true leaders.'

## 'COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP' – THE 'CATCH!'

The 'quality of your actions' and the 'integrity of your intent' requires a **Commitment** from you! It requires you to first behave in a manner that influences and motivates the actions of others. The 'quality of your actions' and the 'integrity of your intent' must be clearly visible. They will be founded in the experience you have gained from working with and being led by others; being part of a successful team and by role models and mentors. Not every experience will have been a positive influence. And that's important because we also need to be sure about what sort of leader we don't want to be. **Commitment** is the hardest of the actions. I can best exemplify it by drawing a parallel to the decision to jump out of a perfectly serviceable aircraft and hope the silk bundle strapped to your back opens. Once you've made

the decision to go, the hard part is over with!! So too with your decision to commit yourself to actions or behaviours that exemplifies integrity of intent.

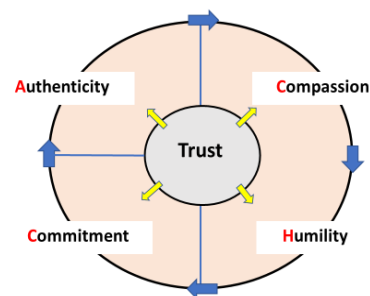
With **Commitment** comes decision to be the real you – **Authentic**. Authenticity is a much over used word in leadership. In simple terms it requires you to have a true understanding of yourself; your strengths, and weaknesses; where you are at your best (your 'sweet spot') and your vulnerabilities. When next you are in front of a mirror, look hard at the reflection staring back at you and ask of it;

“Who are you and what do you stand for? What is your purpose.....as a leader?”

When you are truly able to answer that, you will have discovered the **Authentic** leader. Courageous leaders are those that have discovered their true selves and their true purpose in the everyday things they do.

In his excellent book, *The Speed of Trust* ( 2006 - Stephen MR Covey with Rebecca R Merrill) Stephen Covey Jnr noted that “....*the one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world – one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love....That one thing is Trust..*.” Trust is the centre point of leadership. If people sense you are being **Authentic**, they will intuitively trust you; if they trust you, then your compassion will be deemed the more sincere and real to them. That is why it sits dead centre of **CA'T'CH**. As a leader, your loyalty and integrity must be unquestioned. They must be nested in your core values and be visible. Trust is the hardest of values to earn, yet earn it you must. To be trusted you must first trust – that takes courage on your part. If you do not trust your people, there is no leadership!

The 'Leadership Ball' – Pump it full of Trust.....



and then make sure you **CATCH** it!

There are many ways you can demonstrate or act with **Compassion**; and it takes on many forms. Done right and well, you will be credited for having great understanding, for caring about others. Get it wrong and you will be labelled as too soft; backing away from difficulty.....you get the picture! But **Compassion** you must have, because not only must you understand and care, but as MacArthur noted, you need to listen. **Compassion** is about the capacity to be able to listen to needs and feelings of others. And not just with your ears! You must learn to listen with your eyes too. **Compassion** is also about being able to make the difficult choices when you have to. It's also about recognizing when you are wrong and having the **Humility** to say so!

**Humility** is the last of the **Courageous Leadership** acts, but one of the most important. Without **Humility**, there can be no commitment to others, no authenticity; no trust and no compassion. What is left is arrogance! Arrogance kills performance! Your success as a leader is built by those you lead; failure is more likely as a result of our poor leadership. 'Shared-ownership' means that we are all accountable – but that as your leader, I recognise that if we are not being successful, I am failing you!

## COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We are the product of our life experiences and those shape the 'who' and 'what' we are; they also influence the 'how.' So, here's my story, and as you read through this, see if you recognize '**CATCH**' in action; or indeed, where it was missing!

### STORY 1: ADRIFT

I retired from the Service after nearly 30 years, having served as Deputy Commander for UK Special Forces for nearly 3 years. I immediately reported for work in my new role as an Executive Director with a global invest bank, the No1 bank in the world. I had been offered a job in the previous September and after months of further interviews and meetings, translated that offer into a role in the L&D function. I will admit it wasn't what I had in mind, but I embraced it nonetheless. For one thing, it would enable me to learn about the business and perhaps identify a more client facing position. So in I leapt! Six-figure salary, mixing with some of the most influential and wealthiest people in the business, I was the envy of my serving and retired colleagues. I was living the dream. I was constantly looking to find a position that would enable me to earn the really big salary! I became totally immersed in the culture and was living with the big guns. Home life was pretty non-existent during the week, in part because of commuting and work hours, and at weekends, I was always on my blackberry (emails). And I thought that was OK, because this is what earning the big money required!

Then, six months later, Christine and I went to a funeral of a neighbor. The obituary was truly amazing and a great tribute to Michael, fully of humour and anecdotal stories. As the ceremony drew to a close, Christine turned to me and asked, "What would you like people to say about you?" Initially I was indifferent, but the more I thought on the question, the more I became puzzled by her motive. Later that evening I challenged her – why? She looked at me and replied: "Because, since you have taken this job, you have changed and I am not sure that you're the man I married."

Of course I had changed, I protested! After all, I was now in a different career; needed to be and do things differently; I'm being paid a lot of money and there are expectations that come with that...I pleaded in defence. Christine merely responded by inviting me to "Listen to what I'm saying and then listen to yourself. You have changed and I am not sure I/we like that person!" It was the body blow I needed; the act that took the wind from my sails and allowed 'my ship' to drift listlessly in thought.

What would you like people to say about you, she had asked? I had had an amazing military career. I had a very strong reputation and 'brand,' and was highly regarded by my peers and superiors. I began to realise that person, Colonel David Hopley OBE, would not particularly like the person sitting across from his wife right then. I had surely betrayed everything that I stood for; I had abandoned my brand in an attempt to try and become what the Bank needed me to be – or rather what I thought they needed. I had betrayed my motivational values and become greedy! I needed to reset my morale compass. I need to become the 'Courageous Leader' I was; and find a way of making that work in my new role. That is when I discovered the **CATCH** within me! And by doing that, I effected the changed that was needed. Within 2½ years, I was made co-head of the team with responsibility for EMEA. The transition not had been without bumps in the road, but, **I had rediscover my brand and my values!**

## STORY 2: BEING WHAT THEY NEEDED ME TO BE!

Nothing ever prepares you for death, no matter the age or the circumstances. It first touched me in October 1982, when an officer senior to me, effectively my boss, died in a diving accident on which I was the Diving Supervisor. Although the fault was not mine, it was to scar me in many ways; but I also learnt much about myself; and that was to help me later.

In June 1994, almost 9 months into my command tour, Corporal NB died in a freefall accident. His was the third death in as many months. Although unmarried and, in terms of time in the Service, the youngest, his death hit us very hard. We were less than a week away of a major exercise that was designed to showcase the Service. It would involve virtually the whole organisation and its assets, attract over 200 military and civil servants, and a very senior select group of VVIPs. It was something I had fought hard for because it offered us a unique opportunity to step up and out from under the shadows.. Much more important, perhaps, was the fact that we were in danger of losing our 'home;' with proposals to close the base were being actively considered. This would be a chance to put our case for the retention of the base as our permanent home.

But Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM – the most senior non-commissioned officer in an organization and the Commander's right-hand man) and I felt the Service was wavering, morale was rock bottom and we were in danger of imploding in self-pity. I needed to figure out how we were going to pick ourselves up, deliver the exercise and then be allowed to mourn.

As I stood on the dais and looked at the faces of the men and women in front of me, I did not need to guess how they were feeling; it was written on their expressions for all to see. I had thought long and hard about what I was going to say, and had even made some notes. However, I realised that what they needed right now was not words from their Commanding officer. They needed to hear from their fellow operator, their brother in arms, their friend and mentor. They need reassuring that I too was grieving and that I too shared their loss. They needed to hear that I understood and I cared.

So, for what was nearly 20 minutes, but felt like less, I talked from my heart, even allowing myself a tear. And when it was done, I asked them what our legacy to NB should be; what would he, the proudest and most determined of men, who did selection twice in order to pass, what would he want us to do? We all knew what was at stake in the coming week. With that question out there, I paused and then and only then, spoke as their Commanding Officer. I set out our vision for the future of the Service, a future that started this coming week; a future that would be built as a legacy to those who made it possible, the NBs and the others we had lost on the journey.

The Service delivered the most successful engagement of its kind ever. Many things happened as a consequence, not least the retention of the base as the home of the Service.

**“..I am here to serve you as your Commander, Mentor, Companion and Brother-in-Arms....”** These were the very first words I said to those same men and women in October 1993 on assuming command of the Service! In speaking to those same men and women 9 months later, the quality of my actions and the integrity of their intent was bounded by the compassion I felt for the men under my command and what we were feeling right then.

## EXPERIENCES ARE WHAT SHAPE WHO AND WHAT WE ARE....

So, how do I try and live by and through actions that demonstrate *Courageous Leadership*? Well, there is always a '*catch*,' or so the saying goes, and mine is simply that, as a *Courageous Leader*, every day...all day...wherever I am...I try and.....

- **Aspire to be a role model, in every sense. The way I dress, conduct myself professionally and socially, and treat others**
- **Empower people to do better every day and to grow. It is the most rewarding feeling a person can have, whether a leader or the led.**
- **Never ask someone to do something I have not done or are not willing to do myself**
- **Give people credit for what they do well, and importantly, what I do well, because they make that possible**
- **Be utterly loyal and totally honest with people**

Do I always get it right? No! But that's the '*CATCH*.' It only makes me try harder.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**David Hopley OBE** is an Executive Consultant at Federal Training Academy. He brings over 40 years of experience from working in both the commercial sector, and more broadly, from a highly successful military career. A motivational leadership speaker, David is a former co-head for Europe Middle East & Africa of Goldman Sachs' award winning leadership and development platforms – Goldman Sachs University and Pine Street. As a consultant, he has worked with a variety of clients from the financial, energy, retail, insurance, health care, tourist, Olympic and education sectors, as well as the not-for-profit sector. In addition, David is Chairman for the Board of Trustees for a London-based charity that uses music and dance to discover and enable the potential in young people - giving them opportunities they may not otherwise have to make a difference in the lives. As an Executive Coach, he holds 'member' status with the Association of Coaching. His coaching and mentoring clients range from 'C level' executives across a variety of sectors and institutions, and have included Olympic coaches.



David is affiliated to the US Joint Special Operations University, in Tampa FL, for which he serves as a Distinguished Senior Fellow, and is a member of Allied Corporate Partners (ACP) mentoring panel, helping former members of the US Armed Forces to into second careers. During his 30-year military career in the Royal Marine Commandos and UK Special Forces, David served in a variety of appointments. He has commanded in every rank, and was Commanding Officer of the SBS between 1993-1996. He also served as a member of the teaching staff at the Joint Services Defence College, from 1996-1997. Awarded an OBE in 1994, David's last appointment before retiring on July 2005 was Deputy Commander - UK Special Forces.

**Request David for your next Federal Training Academy contract and/or delivery.**