





INSPIRING

Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee examine one

OTHERS

leader's practice of what they call resonant leadership,

THROUGH

an ability – among many others – to inspire people,

RESONANT

in this case, even in the face of adversity.

LEADERSHIP



For those bold enough to lead in this age of uncertainty, the challenges are immense indeed. Our world is a new world, and it requires a new kind of leadership. Across the globe, just look at what leaders are up against: a world that is more unstable, more dangerous than it was even a few years ago. Social systems in place for ages no longer meet the needs of families, communities or nations. The changes baffle our sense of reason and ignite panic and anger, as well as impulsive, ineffective responses. Indeed, we have seen that global conflicts now touch us personally, striking fear in our hearts even as we go about our daily routines.

Let's look at one leader who consistently meets today's challenges. He saved hundreds of people from injury facing the fury of Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster in the history of the US, as well as saving thousands of jobs for displaced people. Who would think this kind of courageous leadership would come from a university president? Whether cheering his basketball team toward a Division One title or walking in the student union, Scott Cowen exudes enthusiasm. His path to being the inspirational president of Tulane University was the football field, covert operations as a US Army infantry officer, a doctorate, and then, becoming an accounting professor and dean at Case Western Reserve University.

Scott revealed a talent for motivating leaders to emerge from the ranks of research professors at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case. He spent hours talking to executives about their future challenges. Then, he looked for people studying topics that held promise for these coming needs. He searched in doctoral programmes, research institutes, and consulting companies.

Once found, he enticed these far-sighted individuals to join the faculty by talking about possible research discoveries and programmes. He wanted to understand their passion for their work and let them know others would share their enthusiasm at Case. Meanwhile, Scott encouraged existing faculty to create concepts for research centres and development programmes. He listened for insight and fed excitement about innovations. What followed was not a sink-or-swim approach; he asked people to develop the concepts with colleagues in ever-increasing circles of dialogue and debate. While Scott guided them through the minefields of academic politics, they took the visible lead.

In a little over eight years, Scott Cowen inspired more than 15 faculty members (who were 20 per cent of the faculty at the time) to become leaders of programmes that created new markets for the school. They served regional economic development and generated top-ranked programmes. Some faculty rejuvenated existing programmes and

departments to become ranked in the top twenty nationally, like the undergraduate programme and Executive MBA. Others ignited departments, garnering distinctive international recognition.

The magic started in Scott's early conversations with faculty and faculty candidates. Scott questioned them and pulled their ideas, then shared his excitement about the possibilities. The feelings and thoughts aroused by Scott were a powerful force inspiring change. These conversations often stimulated individual creativity and renewal – stirring new ideas in the faculty and a feeling that evolving innovation was alive in the school.

Scott's excellent leadership continues. Today, in the midst of recovering from the horrors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, he has the unique reputation of having moved everyone out of Tulane University and transferred to safety at least twelve hours before the hurricane struck. Five months later, Tulane opened its doors to 90 per cent of the former undergraduates. Although it sustained several hundred million dollars in damage, Scott used the time from October to January to inspire hope among the faculty and staff and compassion with their neighbours in the communities of New Orleans. *Scott Cowen is a resonant leader.*

Sustaining resonant leadership

The men and women we call resonant leaders are stepping up, charting paths through unfamiliar territory, and inspiring people in their organisations, institutions, and communities. They are finding new opportunities within today's challenges, creating hope in the face of fear and despair. These leaders are *moving* people – powerfully, passionately, and purposefully. And they do so while managing the inevitable sacrifices inherent in their roles. They give of themselves, in the service of the cause, while also caring for themselves, engaging in renewal, to ensure they can sustain resonance over time. These resonant leaders are inspiring their organisations and communities to reach for dreams that even a few years ago were impossible.

Resonant leaders are in tune with those around them. This results in people working in sync with each other, in tune with each others' thoughts (what to do) and emotions (why to do it). Leaders who can create resonance are people who either intuitively understand or have worked hard to develop emotional intelligence – namely, the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. They act with mental clarity, not simply following a whim or an impulse. Scott knew what it was like to be a faculty member. His prior skirmishes with danger and mortal crisis were no preparation for this challenge. But his compassion was. He spent a



great deal of time talking to students, faculty, staff, and parents, talking to alumni, community leaders, and other educators. In those conversations, each person knew he cared – and would act on the basis of that care.

In addition to knowing and managing themselves well, emotionally intelligent leaders manage others' emotions, and build strong, trusting relationships. They know that emotions are contagious, and that a leader's emotions are a powerful driver of their people's moods and ultimately their performance. They understand that while fear and anger may mobilise people in the short term, these emotions backfire quickly, leaving people distracted, anxious, and ineffective. They have empathy. They read people, groups, and organisational cultures accurately, and they build lasting relationships. Scott's compassion was contagious and helped others become even more resilient than they were feeling.

Resonant leaders inspire through demonstrating passion, commitment and deep concern for people and the organisational vision. They cause those around them to want to move, in concert, toward an exciting future. They give us courage and hope, and help us to become the best that we can be. The physical and logistical challenges to getting Tulane up and running again were nothing as compared to the possible financial disaster looming. But it was here that Scott's consistent message about learning and the purpose of the university and its role within the New Orleans community empowered people to think creatively and boldly. And it worked.

Resonant leaders help their organisations blend financial, human, intellectual, environmental, and social capital into a potent recipe for effective performance in organisations. In other words, in

addition to being great to work with, they get *results*, as did Scott Cowen both as dean of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case and as president of Tulane University. Of course, to be great, a leader needs to understand the market, the technology, the people, and a multitude of things about the organisation. While this knowledge is necessary, it is not sufficient to produce sustainable, effective leaders. This is where resonance comes into play. Resonance enables the leader to use this expertise in pursuit of the organisation's performance. It allows the leader to engage the power of all of the people who work in and around the organisation.

Losing resonance

But in today's challenging environment, we have seen a disturbing change among leaders with whom we work: even good leaders are finding it very difficult to *sustain their effectiveness – and resonance – over time*. Most leaders are not faced with an acute crisis, like a massive natural disaster, terrorist bomb, or major produce failure. But most leaders are faced with a multitude of crises every week. We can understand why that happens to leaders who never practiced emotional intelligence in the first place; it is easy to see why those leaders might have trouble sustaining resonance and effectiveness in today's new uncharted waters. But how is it that even our best leaders lose their resonance?

The best leaders give of themselves constantly. When leaders sacrifice too much for too long – and reap too little – they can become trapped in what we call the "sacrifice syndrome." Leadership is exciting, but it is also stressful. It is the science of power and influence – and power creates →

→ distance between people. Leadership is lonely. Leaders are often cut off from support and relationships with people.

We found one clue for why dissonance happens in a phenomenon we observed that we call “power stress”: the unique brand of stress that is a basic part of being a leader, especially today. Our bodies are just not equipped to deal with this kind of stress, day in and day out, year after year. Over time, we become exhausted – we burn out or burn up. The constant small crises, heavy responsibilities, and the perpetual need to influence people can be a heavy burden, such a burden that we find ourselves trapped in the sacrifice syndrome and we slip into internal disquiet, unrest, and dis-stress. When dissonance takes over, individuals suffer physically and emotionally, and cognitive functioning is impaired. In other words, *dissonance becomes the default*. And, because our emotions are contagious, dissonance spreads quickly to those around us and eventually permeates our organisations.

It is all too easy for leaders – even good leaders – to slip into dissonance. How can we avoid it? Recent research tells us that to counter the sacrifice syndrome, leaders need to focus on *renewal*:

attending to themselves and others, by cultivating experiences that energise and reinvigorate.

In fact, research tells us that the same three paths that help leaders to create resonance also help to restore and renew the leader – and this spreads to others – as it did in New Orleans with Scott Cowen and Tulane. The three paths are mindfulness, hope and compassion. They actually spark physiological changes that help to reverse the negative effects of power stress. By mindfully attending to oneself and others, encouraging an optimistic vision of the future, and caring for others, leaders can ignite resonance in themselves and those around them. Mindfulness, hope, and compassion enable resonant leadership and these same experiences enable renewal, which allows leaders to sustain their effectiveness. Then others catch it and become excited, creative and energised to be resilient, adaptive, and their best. ■

Resources

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

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