

# leadership in current organisations

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**We shall analyse the concept of leadership from three assertions that I uphold:**

- ▶ **The leader is not always the most powerful; however he is the one who shows the way and ensures that others follow.**
- ▶ **A leader is born and with training, becomes one.**
- ▶ **The most effective instrument that a leader has in managing is consistency, as well as personal example.**

## The hourglass

I am convinced that Human Resources is the key to the organisational success or failure of companies, and that Human Relations (also HR) practices and policies must be linked to the whole corporate strategy. I am therefore certain that organisations will succeed if they are capable of working like an hourglass, an instrument for measuring time, which consists of two containers connected by an orifice. The hourglass works well if the central section, where the two glass or plastic containers meet, through that orifice, is clean and correctly designed to allow the sand to run through smoothly, at the right pace, so that it gives us an accurate indication of the time that has elapsed.

To use a metaphor, the company -or any

other organisation for that matter- is a model of a large hourglass:

- ▶ The upper container houses shareholders, the Board of Directors and senior management.
- ▶ The lower one, employees.
- ▶ The central section, the heart of the company, where the orifice is located which adjusts the flow of sand, would house managers, heads of department, supervisors, middle managers and executives: all those who have responsibilities over others.

The company -like the hourglass- will work adequately if the sand flows smoothly and moves from one receptacle to the other at a set rate. Its operation is guaranteed by a set of values and





principles, as well as consistent performance and adequate design and structure to guarantee the necessary productivity. The company will fulfil its mission if it has been able to integrate all those who act as a bridge between senior management and employees into a common project. In other words, intermediate managers, heads of departments and executives. Through them, like in the hourglass, senior management directives reach employees and, thanks to them, in a two directional flow which must never be exhausted, employees' aspirations and requests reach their destination and can be known at senior executive level.

We cannot forget that the hourglass' position must be changed when all the sand that was in the upper receptacle has moved into the lower one. Then, employees (now in the upper section of the hourglass) send their messages to

senior management, who receive them from below. In the centre, as before and fulfilling their task of providing continuity and driving force to the operation of the hourglass/company, are the same people: heads of department, supervisors and executives. They are the ones to whom, in organisations, we must give the most attention, with particular dedication and train (educate) sparing no effort, especially in management skills and human behaviour.

### **The need for a leader in every company**

It is the way of the world that the human condition has always needed leaders. From the beginning of time, human groups -and the company is one of many possible groups- have always needed someone to show us the way and ensure that others follow. This, and nothing else, is leadership.

Among other things, leadership requires a few main conditions: legitimacy (of origin or exercise), ideological and propositional ability and will, especially to know what is required and be willing to pay the price.

**A leader is shaped according to certain conditions; their absence produces dictators, despots or prophets.**

Leaders are not necessarily those who give the most orders, it is an obligation - and responsibility- of senior management to detect them among those charismatic employees, ultimately leaders, who are capable of putting across the company and its values to their colleagues: with their example, motivation and what we now call "branding".

I am certain that we must live the present from an historical point of view. Today is

## The ten commitments of leaders and executives

### I. Global mind and vision

However important the various departments are (administration, marketing, HR), taken individually they are simply part of a whole. Autonomy of operation is convenient and advisable, but never independence. Those responsible for parts of an organisation –always with the backing of senior management- must be aware of what is taking place throughout the company, its general objectives, how they can contribute to achieving them and how -from their department- they have to actively relate to and collaborate with other departments.

### II. Training and skills acquisition

Skills acquisition is a challenge which takes the form of a strategic tool: companies must use it to speedily adapt to current changes and maintain their competitive position. And it must be the leading companies, by conviction, and even more so in a time of crisis, which introduce ongoing collective training procedures.

### III. Information and communication

**The leader has a duty to keep himself informed and an obligation to inform others.** And leading companies have an obligation to relate anything of relevance that occurs within them to all interest groups. In addition, and this is called communicating, it must involve those same interest groups in the objectives and strategies of the company, putting “soul” and emotion into the projects it wishes to develop.

### IV. Vision of the future and initiative

**The leader must be able to keep ahead of events.** In addition to representing an extraordinary competitive edge, this motivates the organisation and makes employees feel the so-called “pride in belonging”.

### V. Example and values

Living changes us, even though we may not realise it. In order to continue being one, a leader must follow the advice given by Seneca two thousand years ago: “Better to choose those who teach from experience rather than by words; those who say what they do and do what they say”. This is the example, if we act accordingly. Only those organisations and people who possess and practice values will overcome the crisis and in addition come out of them stronger if they act consistently.

### VI. Decision/action and mistakes

In corporate life we have to take decisions every day and assume certain risks, and also make mistakes. And design strategies, which must be intelligent, global responses. **Management is nothing more than lucid error management.** Mistakes help us to learn and usually we do not repeat them. Making mistakes is probably the most sacred of human rights.

### VII. Delegation and supervision

We have to create and lead true teams, with skills and responsibilities for each and every one of their members. To delegate, which is not in contradiction to supervise, is to give each employee

the opportunity to do the things he knows and has to do and for which he has to be prepared; and if he is not, he has to be trained before anything can be delegated to him. And this is the responsibility of the leader/executive.

### VIII. Humility and undertaking

**The leader has to be humble as a formula or antidote against depression.** Neither must he be stupid. A leader's main undertaking is loyalty and the sacred duty to protect and grow the company for those who come after. The leader is only the custodian of a heritage and primarily responsible for it. The undertaking is nothing more or less than giving an undertaking with others to give, say or do something.

### IX. Empathy

Empathy is the beautiful quality that enables us to put ourselves in the shoes of another person and, together with ethics, forms the basis of our values. It must be practiced generously and permanently, because it is the guarantee and the best medicine for solving any dispute whoever it may be with. **The leader is either empathic or he is not a leader.** And that means talking.

### X. Working harder than the others

The leader will make himself more of a leader, and more human, if he shows his ability to make an effort, work and overcome, by example. The leader-executive has to work primarily for the company and its employees, managing them, as he is obliged to do, and helping to speed up and invigorate the life and history of the company.



also a part of everyone's future. Therefore genuine leadership has to commit itself to a set of corporate values and bring together a few characteristics that I have conveniently listed under ten headings.

### **Role of the company society**

The secret lies in the fact that without ethical behaviour, without consistency it is difficult to get people excited and manage them based on a relationship of trust. Just like the cities that man builds to defend himself, to develop freedom within them with other free men, reason and sociability, the main responsibility of the company and its managers is to provide work, create wealth, make profits and be economically efficient. However, the company and its management now have another responsibility that runs parallel with or even beyond economic results: the company must contribute to making a more humane and habitable scenario possible.

Erasmus of Rotterdam believed that a human being is easily deceived by appearances; and that is true, but we must not confuse appearance with reality nor success with excellence. It is not difficult to be successful. As Albert Camus wrote, what is difficult is to deserve it. And although it may be so, the similarity between success and merit deceives men and women. Ultimately, success is nothing more than the result, whether good or bad, of a company or a share and it is normally fleeting.

Today more than ever, we must be able to build competent companies, in other words adequate, proportionate, fit, suitable and which do not look in the mirror. Leading organisations based on people and values which in turn create value. The first and last reason for these words is undeniably ethics: a fight for values in organisations. A long and difficult battle, as it has always been

throughout history. Nietzsche warned: "one generation has to begin the battle which another has to win". We must fight for man himself. Although we cannot see it, although I have not been able to express it, in this lecture is recorded that famous sentence of Seneca which expresses the ultimate meaning of my words: "Homo homini sacra res", Man is sacred to man. ■

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### **Other books by J.J. Almagro**

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