

“Yes We Can!”

Leadership 101

It's August 2010 and we are in full election mode. Watching this federal election campaign, including the recent leadership debate, you may be excused for mistaking the proceedings for a high cost sibling squabble. This begs the question: what happened to visionary leadership?

If you watched the election debate, you would have seen the market research analysis tool, “the worm”, indicate decreasing popularity for negative comments and scare tactic arguments. On the flipside, as the leaders put forward their positive visions for the future, the worm indicated a positive audience response. This observation is reflective of our nature as intelligent human beings. We are more drawn to a positive vision and respond unenthusiastically to negative scare tactics. We are simply not receptive to the pessimistic threats that one leader makes about what life will be like under another leader. It comes across as biased and we wonder why the leader is spending time on scare tactics instead of nurturing their own vision for the future. Is it that they don't have their own vision? Or they don't have a vision they believe they can sell?

As complex and intelligent human beings, we are able to recognise that life is not black or white. It isn't going to be all good, or all bad, under any given leadership, be it political, commercial or social. Some outcomes will be the same, simply achieved through different methods, and all leaders will believe their methods are the best. But we are smart. We know that no one has all the answers. So when we need to place our faith in a leader, at work, in politics, in sporting teams or somewhere else, we look for the

evidence which suggests that we will have a better life. And we will choose to follow the person we believe will provide us with that better life.

A critical leadership trait missing across the spectrum in this campaign, and in many leadership challenges in and out of politics, is the recognition that what people want to hear is a message of hope. We don't buy in to a vision because we think it is completely right and any other vision is completely wrong. We buy into a vision because we believe it will deliver a brighter future for us and our community. When leadership demonstrates negativity, we are left to independently decipher the hope in the message. This creates mixed messages open to confusion, interpretation and a bitter taste.

In order to follow, we need to have only one question answered... “Why?” Why should I follow you? If, as a leader, you can answer this question for your followers, you have effectively shared your vision for the future.

Everyone is a leader in their own life. We each lead ourselves every day. We manage our success, our professional image and our decisions. Some of us are also the leaders of others. The successful leaders are those who strive to create opportunities for positive leadership. Successful leaders spend their valuable air time sharing a vision of hope for the future. They communicate by

speaking and by listening. They look for commonalities rather than disparities. They concentrate on what we can all achieve together, rather than what others will not achieve. Napoleon Bonaparte was right when he said “A leader is a dealer in hope”.

When it comes to leadership in your life, whether you are the leader or the follower, set your bar high. Share the vision of hope, honour your values and focus on the positive outcomes. The rest will follow.

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