



CUTTINGS

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Manage Like Barack Obama

How organisations can learn from politics rather than the other way around? Not a campaign theme in the UK at present with all of the crises in the Parliament, but over the other side of the pond, in the USA, authors have been analysing the success of Obama's candidacy, election and first 100 days to draw some lessons on leadership and management.

President Obama's extraordinary campaign was a feat of managing ideas, people and technology on a scale so massive and demanding that observers rank it as a sort of Manhattan Project of presidential politics. One new book on the subject draws three main lessons:

"Be cool". (In temperament not fashion!). Obama focused on his goal and ignored distractions. He corrected problems without blaming people. He could adjust to the needs of the moment, play hardball only when necessary and lead without losing his humility. He has retained this quality even after his campaign, admitting he

"screwed up" after two of his cabinet nominees had to withdraw over non-payment of tax.

"Be social". It is widely agreed that unleashing social technologies – blogs, discussion boards, viral videos, texting and mobile phone networks – gave the campaign a crucial edge. Among other things, it allowed the campaign to motivate an army of volunteers, and rapidly rebut criticism. Companies do themselves a big service if they look at the benefits of these social technologies – more customers, lower costs, additional leads, higher efficiency, and greater profits.

"Be the change". Just as Obama's campaign relied on promising radical change, if business leaders have not yet answered or even recognised the need for drastic action, they will find themselves needing to make way for others.

But many of these observations and books need to have a health warning! Eight years ago, the New

York Times was finding positive management lessons in George W. Bush! An article lauded the former president for saying that good management—like his selection of Dick Cheney as his running mate—makes good politics. As Bush has introduced his proposed cabinet, he has given the nation a rolling seminar on management, sounding at times as though he were reading from a primer for aspiring child executives."

Within a few years, however, Bush had inspired more articles and management books about what not to do. Some show how he had the same traits that have led companies like Enron, Worldcom, Global Crossings, Adelphia and others to defraud shareholders and stumble.

So some good ideas, but fingers crossed that we won't soon be reading "Screw Up Your Business the Obama Way"!

Barack, Inc: Winning Business Lessons of the Obama Campaign. Barry Libert & Rick Faulk, Economist.com February 2009

The Enterprise of the Future

Organisations are bombarded by change, and many are struggling to keep up. Eight out of ten CEOs see significant change ahead, and yet see the gap between the change and the ability to manage increasing – so finds the IBM Global CEO Study. In their view, the Enterprise of the Future is ...

Hungry For Change: capable of changing quickly and successfully, instead of merely responding to trends, it shapes and leads them.

Innovative Beyond Customer Imagination: surpassing the expectations of increasingly

demanding customers. Deep collaborative relationships allow it to surprise customers with innovations that make customers and itself more successful.

Globally Integrated to take advantage of the global economy. Its business is strategically designed to access the best capabilities, knowledge and assets from wherever they reside in the world and apply them wherever required in the world.

Disruptive By Nature: radically challenging its business model, disrupting the basis of competition.

It shifts the value proposition, overturns traditional delivery approaches and, as soon as opportunities arise, reinvents itself and its entire industry.

Genuine, Not Just Generous: going beyond philanthropy and compliance and reflecting genuine concern for society in all actions and decisions.

Interestingly, the themes of innovation, collaboration, speed, breaking habits are all features of jazz improvisation (*see next page!*)

The Enterprise of the Future: IBM Global CEO Study

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Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

- ✂ “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” *Maria Robinson*
- ✂ “A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.” *John Lennon*
- ✂ “It takes a long time to become young.” *Pablo Picasso*
- ✂ “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.” *Helen Keller*
- ✂ “If two men agree on everything, you may be sure that one of them is doing the thinking.” *Lyndon B. Johnson*
- ✂ “Leadership is the ability to make wise adept choices, both singularly and collectively, by persons who courageously serve the welcoming promise of authenticity.” *Bob Terry*
- ✂ “Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing, there is a field. I will meet you there.” *Persian proverb*
- ✂ “The next best thing to knowing something is to know where to find it.” *Samuel Johnson*
- ✂ “There is only one success - to be able to spend your life in your own way.” *Christopher Morley*
- ✂ “Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time. Action with Vision is making a positive difference.” *Joel Barker*
- ✂ “Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.” *Tennessee Williams*
- ✂ “What is right is often forgotten by what is convenient.” *Bodie Thoene*
- ✂ “Everyone stumbles over the truth from time to time, but most people pick themselves up and hurry off as though nothing ever happened.” *Winston Churchill*
- ✂ “First weigh the considerations, then take the risks.” *Helmuth von Moltke*

Kind of Blue

Since it hit the streets 50 years ago this year, *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis has influenced the hearts and minds of jazz fans everywhere.

And it has influenced management thinking. I was first introduced to the idea of using the album as a case study by Frank Barrett, one of the pioneers of Appreciative Inquiry, when he led a seminar on Jazz and Organisation in London a number of years ago. He identified the principles of jazz improvisation in OD practice – minimal structure; embrace errors; appreciative competence; everyone solos and supports; etc. – in a seminal article in 1998.

I initially wrote about Jazz in *Cuttings* 51 following a spate of articles. Now Harvard Business School is getting on board. To celebrate the anniversary of *Kind of Blue*, Prof. Robert D. Austin and Carl Størmer have produced a new business case study.

They highlight a number of key concepts that they take from the album:

- It’s an example of the ‘S’ Curve: By jumping off a successful formula before it has peaked onto a new curve is risky, but is the hallmark of many successful innovations. In *Kind of Blue* Miles Davis radically detached from his previous career path to craft a different future.
- Simplicity: Davis’ innovation was to turn 180° from the complexities of bebop. This empowered and freed the players to improvise and create without preconceptions or requiring them to put their technical mastery on show.
- Short sessions and first takes: Famously, *Kind of Blue* was recorded in two sessions totalling only eight hours, and most were first takes. The result was spontaneity and freshness.

For businesses seeking innovation they could do no better than to listen to the lessons of *Kind of Blue*.

Kind of Blue: Pushing Boundaries with Miles Davis, HBS Working Knowledge, April 2009

Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations, Frank Barrett, Organization Science 1998

Cuttings 51, June 2004

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6-7 July (London)

1-2 September (London)

24-25 September (Brussels)

Managing Technical Professionals

8-9 October (London)

Internal Consulting Skills

12-13 November (London)

More Dissatisfaction

According to a recent report by the CIPD, 38% of employees (53% in manufacturing) are dissatisfied with their company appraisal process, saying it is about chasing paperwork not about achieving results.

The same research found that 30% of employees were dissatisfied with the training and development they receive and 33% dissatisfied with their career development. With these factors being critical for engagement of the work-force (especially Generation Y), it seems like a number of companies need to make some improvements.

MORE INFORMATION

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