

Setting Out on a Leadership Journey

I have just started listening to “The Hobbit” while driving, and it occurred to me that the way Bilbo Baggins sets out on his adventure was probably very similar to the way many businesses are set up. Bilbo, for those who don’t know, sets out on a journey without his hat, his wallet, his handkerchief – in fact thoroughly unprepared. Indeed it is only after he agrees to go (an act of bravado rather than rational thought) does he learn of the objective! Is it, I wonder, an analogy, for business?

There are thousands of business entrepreneurs and leaders in this country each of whom is a leader if only of themselves. Each owner/entrepreneur/team leader is actually setting out on a leadership journey. They have to lead themselves, their staff, their customers and their suppliers, but I wonder if they give any serious thought to it. Does leadership feature in their initial business plan? I don’t know of course but I somehow doubt it. And if it did, what would be covered in that section?

Perhaps what we need to ask ourselves is a series of questions:

- What are my leadership values? What really matters to me? Why? These drive our emotions, our thought processes and of course our actions, so we need to be clear on them from the start.
- Then we need to ask how our values drive our leadership behaviour and its subsequent impact on others
- Next would be our vision of the company. What do we want it to be? Not in terms of turnover and profit but in terms of what it will look and feel like. What about it will attract people (staff and customers)? What will make it stand out from other similar companies and offerings?
- Moving on, perhaps next we need to consider what it will be like to lead an organisation or part of a business. I’ve often heard people say that they want the freedom of running their own business. However with that freedom goes responsibility, expectation, excitement, good times and low, so again we had better be prepared for it. If Bilbo had known what he was facing when he set out, he would either not have gone (a shame) or better still have been thoroughly prepared.

If we are to lead ourselves and others, we have to find a way of transmitting that inner belief driven by our values into our business. Whatever our values, if we live them at work then that will shine through in everything we do. Do that and we will be magnetically inspiring as leader. No-one really wants to be unhappy at work, so whether we are leaders of a business, or leaders in a business, we need to find a way to work in a way that really suits us. Concentrate on the people and the profit will follow – after all it is the people that actually deliver, whether that is in a one person band, or as a team. So are you prepared for the journey or are you a latter day Bilbo Baggins?

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