

Virtually NAKED®

Follow-on skills and refreshing ideas
for Graduates and Friends of

NAKED LEADERSHIP®

Issue 45

Leadership is Ownership

One of the biggest personal challenges in becoming a leader can be learning to take responsibility for your team's actions.

Of course I don't mean their personal choices or performance problems but the overall results of what your team does. Taking the good with the bad can be irritating. Mistakes or issues that affect the outcome of what your team does can test your patience and judgement and leave you worrying about how you are perceived as a leader/ manager. These mistakes can also trap us into unproductive behaviour such as blaming or deflection. Deflection of blame is a human protective instinct. It starts when we are very young and is a hard habit to break.

My partner has a delightful 5 year old girl and we have a lot of fun being silly, playing games and generally causing mayhem. When her mother calls out from the other room enquiring about the joyful noise, the first giggly words out of the little one's mouth are "He started it!"

Of course we all know who the culprit is (well okay, sometimes *it is me*) but it demonstrates how early even good natured blame shifting starts.

As we grow up and particularly if we have younger brothers or sisters we experience being 'in charge' of others whether we have the skills for this or not.

In the absence of truly effective leadership training and mentoring we can carry over our habits and resentments into a leadership position and this only makes our jobs harder.

As we begin to encounter seemingly inexplicable behaviour from our team members and increasing pressure for performance from our boss, we may begin to wonder why we are bothering at all.

Frustration can also lead to the opinion that the team is useless or that you have to do everything yourself. This is a road that leads nowhere.

At some point we have to stand back, take a breath and begin to work out what is happening. Because this may mean tackling performance issues with individuals the temptation is to avoid this pain and just muddle along.

Yet the task of reinvigorating our operation, even in times of difficulty is why we are here. Taking ownership means accepting the good with the bad and working to make it better. When things go wrong it is very easy to simply lump the blame onto the person who was the primary 'doer' or

whose job it is but I have learned from experience that taking this view, means I will rarely discover the underlying cause and therefore be unable to prevent its reoccurrence.

As leaders, we cannot control another's behaviour but what we can do is create the conditions wherein they will have the greatest chance of success. We can also follow their progress and ensure that they have all the support that they need.

In practicing 'Forensic Leadership'[™] I have, on a number of occasions sat with leaders whose frustration was reaching boiling point and through a process of questioning had them come to understand that *they* were part of the problem.

A leader standing back and saying of an individual or team; '*They should know because it's their job*' is not being part of the solution. As we have discussed in every NAKED LEADERSHIP workshop, when faced with a problem either with a team or an individual, we must begin our thought process or investigation by saying "**How much of this do I/we own?**"

Errors like straws, upon the surface flow; he who would search for pearls must dive below.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

With this concept in mind, it should come as no surprise that **Naked Clue #1 is Clear Expectations.**

Creating Clear Expectations is a two way street. If we do not understand what our boss wants from us we need to ask effective questions until we have all the information we need.

The challenge is that once we have been briefed, we may feel silly if we have to ask for clarification and yet incomplete information is very often where it all begins to go wrong.

When we then pass on incomplete information or understanding we have completed another link in the error chain. Then when it all goes wrong, human nature tends to blame the last person in the chain. This might feel better for a moment but we have not solved the problem that initiated the disaster.

Interestingly, the world is full of people operating on incomplete information and this is often the reason for conflicts large and small.

Falsely apportioned blame has been used as a tool to start wars right throughout history.

Being able to disconnect from irritation or anger and to look through the emotional fog long enough to begin to ask intelligent questions and to challenge our first impressions, is a sign of emotional intelligence and good leadership. We cannot chart the correct course until we have considered as much information as possible.

This is a challenging concept for many leader/managers as it is for many parents. When we find ourselves getting angry we have to stop, *DIS-connect*[®] and ask:

Why am I getting angry?

How will this affect my judgement?

How much of this problem do I own?

Have I/we contributed to this problem?

This is harder to do that is sounds but is absolutely essential.

Owning the wins *and* the losses is the sign of a good coach and a good leader. It also allows us to learn from our mistakes and so be better prepared in the future. No team wins forever, so the sooner we take ownership of what we are doing and track it back as far as we can, we will find out where problems or successes begin. In the case of problems we can change a behaviour or process and block the error path from ever beginning. In the case of successes, we can identify what it was that made us successful and replicate it.

Remember, clever investors get rich during a stock market downturn because they stand back and look for opportunities where everyone else sees chaos. They look through the fear, buy shares cheaply and get richer!

If we have actively identified our strengths and weaknesses and are then faced with changes or challenging business conditions, we will be much more prepared to adapt than someone who simply lets things happen to them.

If we as leaders are willing to take the praise for successes, we must take responsibility for failures and actively seek the lessons contained within rather than just walking around feeling stressed.

Taking ownership is a Naked Leadership trait because it is proactive. It says to the world:

This is what I have:

-What do I need to understand about it?

-What can I learn from it?

-What can I make from it?

It takes courage, integrity and persistence but it works...