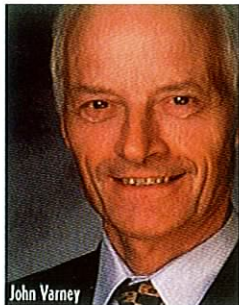
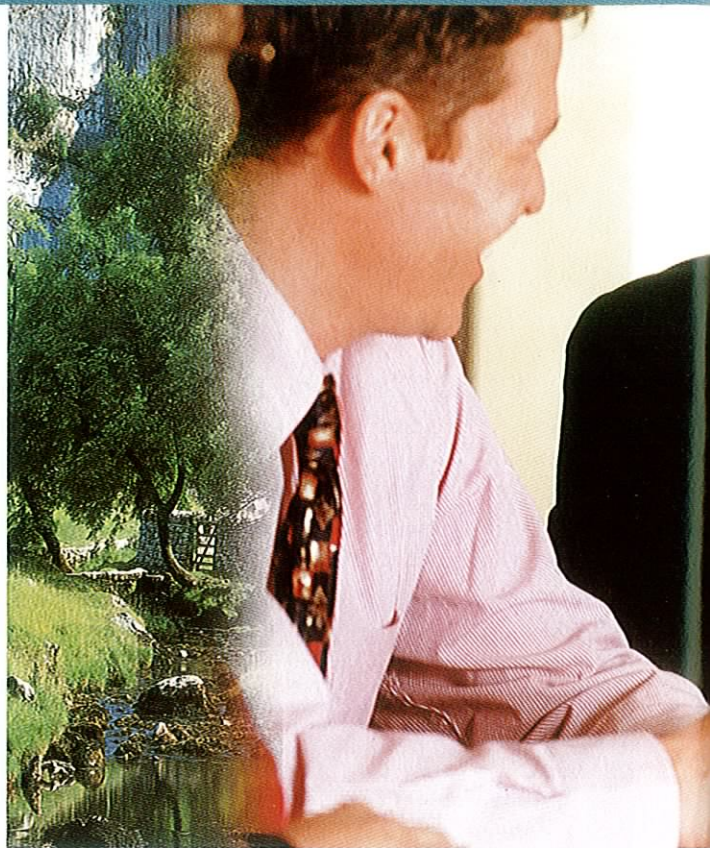


# The **NEW LEADERS**

**JOHN VARNEY** explains why the old type of leader is now redundant and how we must all become leaders



**When we listen to music**, really listen, or when we see a picture or commune with nature, we have no need of words. Words are needed for reasoning (and reasoning is very important to us) but they are not our only way of thinking or communicating. Words and language can all too easily constrain our thoughts. Even the word leadership is not what it used to be. Its meaning is changing and evolving and we need to understand it anew. If we use the word leadership as it was understood a generation ago, we are missing its current vitality. Believing the word is still the same, we blind ourselves to what it has come to mean today.

Much of the English language is that of the industrial revolution and the enlightenment. The prevailing organisational metaphors were, and still are, based on clockwork. This was a great shift in perception in its day but is now no longer useful. The breakthroughs in thinking of Newton and Descartes gave us modern science - and hence the technology of the industrial revolution - but are constraints as we enter a post-industrial age.

Nowadays, it is not sufficient to have a vast organisation that works like a machine, with one central point of control and complex levers and pulleys operating in remote places. In such an organisation, information required for decisions to be made takes too long to come through (IT is not enough to overcome the inertia) and the people taking the decisions can have no real

experience of conditions in the field. The whole system is too insensitive and too slow to respond.

Instead of organising in a way that is based on the mechanistic models of the industrial revolution, we now need to organise like nature. In business this means finding a way of being that engages all the talent and mind-power, not just of a hierarchical elite but of everyone in the organisation. The really advanced forms of organisation are more akin to natural systems. They are devolved. There is no hierarchy to speak of. Decisions are taken very close to the action and the people in core roles are free to look at broad strategies rather than being caught up in operational detail.

The idea of a great leader fits with the mechanistic model of organisation - the control and command hierarchy. In a natural model, leadership is diffused, everyone has responsibility for it. We could think of it as 360 degree leadership. We have leadership responsibility to those who report to us, we have leadership responsibility to our peers and, perhaps surprisingly, we have leadership responsibility for those with a broader remit than our own. This is the leadership of self-organisation. As a simple example, observe a flock of birds. Nobody gives the orders yet they synchronise their movements, they flow across the landscape and avoid obstacles; with their tiny brains they achieve collectively intelligent and appropriate performance.





In the new kind of leadership there are three important 'C's, primary principles which work in a dynamic relationship; consciousness, cohesion and commitment. Consciousness is really seeing what is going on in detail and also seeing the big picture, seeing both the wood and the trees. It is being aware without judgement, of all the factors and forces present in the current situation. You need to read the clues but to read them you first have to be there and be aware. Not only that, you have to act accordingly. There can be no gap between what you say and what you do. You must act according to your stated values and intent. This is sometimes glibly called 'walking the talk' but many people interpret that conveniently as making the gestures, paying lip-service. Make no mistake, you cannot pretend to leadership.

Cohesion is the holding together of things. You have heard of the idea of the whole being more than the sum of its parts. It really can be if we have cohesion. If what we have is coercion, the whole will always be less than the sum of the parts. Cohesion makes us a community, a common unity, that implies also we have compassion. Cohesion must depend on freedom to choose.

Remember that in the natural way of organising, everyone is there because they choose to be, but such choosing may require support. We all contribute to cohesion. If we are not pulling together, we are pulling apart. On the other hand we have to guard against collusion,

which can result in the phenomenon of 'group-think', a sort of miasma that makes intelligent people act foolishly.

Commitment implies congruence and cohesion, it is no mean thing - it is all committing and requires courage. You cannot pretend to commitment because you will be exposed. Commitment is much more than good intention - it is an act of will. It comes from choice and like a response to challenge, is all-engaging. It is what grows us as human beings.

In Shakespeare's play, Henry V prepares his men for battle with the famous speech which begins: 'once more unto the breach dear friends, once more.' Henry is working to enable people to volunteer, to engage in battle as a matter of choice, without which there is no commitment; to summon the whole that is more than the sum of the parts, to be congruent even (or especially) when faced by death.

I used to teach survival psychology. What is it that makes the difference between those who live and those who die in crisis situations? Survival is a commitment and some prefer to take the soft option. If you persist in being a victim of circumstance you will pay the price. One of life's great secrets is that nobody can compel you to do what you choose to do. If you are ever under compulsion you can achieve freedom by deciding to accept the task voluntarily. If something is to be done, it can be done 'over your dead body' or with joy because you choose to take it on. Most people fail to choose. You can choose to be a winner. You can choose to take responsibility. You can choose to welcome change and to thrive on it. You can choose to take your leadership opportunity. Simply believing in yourself is not enough - you need to prepare, to equip yourself, to practise. There is an aphorism from the Arab world that is worth remembering; 'trust in God - but tie your camel first!'

People sometimes think that the leaders are other people, but we are all leaders. However small our role, it is vital we play it. Maybe our part is modest, requiring that we display our courage among our friends or that we support people in need. It doesn't matter how humble it is so long as we do it to the best of our ability, rising to the challenges it presents. As we do, so we feed our spirit and become a source of inspiration to others. This is the very stuff of life itself. ●  
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