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A Business Philosophy for Rebel Leaders

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Rebel Leaders and Corporate Mindset

Corporate Mindset is often a systemic obstacle to the innovation and success it currently needs. As we journey through the impact of Covid, we need bright, innovative genius and deep, consistent values. **We need people prepared to make deep changes – the Rebel Leader.** How can we adjust and cultivate the mindset which enables this? How do we use the best of what we have to survive and thrive? Is it possible to make radical, safe, empowering change?

The language of change has long been around in organisations and disruption is now a shared, lived experience. We seek business solutions that are profitable, personalised, nimble and innovative. We're used to the glorification of moon-shot start-ups, disruptive rule breakers, radical thinkers with social media encouraging people en masse to follow their dream, make millions and save the planet. Covid-19 added an extra urgent imperative: innovate to survive. We need major systems-change.

Now, more than ever, we realise the game of big business needs to transform rapidly, but we come from an era in which corporations were not designed to do so. **We have a long-held mindset which has the implicit effect of ensuring that few employees at any level are brave enough to make radical changes.**

Fearing shame if the company 'loses' because they didn't play the game correctly, initiating deep change creates tension with traditional corporate values.

Corporate values and protocols collectively represent a worldview which crosses cultures, countries, and cause. They have major influence in our current reality and they're the possible veto-vote in everything from politics and environment to family dynamics and mental health. Corporates are my favourite passion project because of their impact – they are the space in which intentional change makes a big difference. In Corporates, change has compounded impact and my drive is to ensure this is transformative, meaningful, ethical, and effective.

From an individual or team perspective, potent organisational change is

repressed by certain ways of doing things. We'll call it Corporate Mindset and it's deeply systemic. It does not necessarily win gold stars in the popularity stakes, but it is followed with cult-like obedience because it feels bigger than us.

Enter Rebel Leaders - non-conventional, differently skilled, and precisely what large organisations are looking for, even if unconsciously.

So, what's the problem?

Maverick visionaries with a sense of purpose have exponential potential for impact and influence. They're thinking out of the box, looking to make a difference and driven to excel. When a person is both real and ethical whilst leading with a vision and conviction, they get major support. When given room to make authentic change, these 'organisational outsiders' can become resilient,

innovative, solution-creators. Successful Rebel Leaders are adaptive, agile, systems thinkers – they're the clues, doorways, and maps to our future.

And they often terrify Corporate Mindset.

Rebel Leaders can be difficult to manage in the traditional way. **They're unimpressed by protocol or jargon and frustrated by tick-box versions of change** (those well-marketed and beautifully branded transformations that create new packaging for More-of-the-Same). They can be nerve-wracking, because their pace, methodology and way of following process may seem alien. They need autonomy, challenge, trust, and space to think creatively, whereas Corporate Mindset is schooled to function on spreadsheet detail.

Rebel Leaders align with intentional principles. They want to interrogate systems until they can produce whole, sustainable, inclusive results. They want impact and meaning. They want to change the world. Corporate Mindset is hooked by the idea of these kinds of results yet trapped in the comfort zone of 'the way things are usually done around here'. For Rebel Leaders in organisations, this eventually creates stubborn inertia, drains life-force and inspiration, and often causes stress and/or ego-based, destructive rebellion.

Don't Worry, we've got a whole Department for that!

Attempting to remain relevant, Corporate Mindset sometimes produces a well-meaning simulation of the Rebel Leader which seems both exciting and safer. This symbolic challenger positions as a crusader for change in reaction to frustration and in recognising the value of innovation. Different from a Rebel Leader, it responds to what already exists by

following Corporate Mindset assumptions and tweaked protocols. The real result is negotiation, compromise, and fatigue, parading as breakthrough and change.

The crusader can have an effect. They can make incremental change and they can sometimes activate a groundswell. However, if this grows enough to have systemic impact, the system will 'eat it'. This means that the momentum of change gets colonised and reworked back into the Corporate Mindset system, using compromise languages like bottom line, business logic, trade-offs, and trendy branding.

Populist corporate revolutions and semi-innovations have seemed comforting in the past because they looked like change. Unfortunately, too often they were actually just lids to cover the boiling frog.* Terminologies changed, restructuring was initiated, brands and logos updated, but the underlying protocols and processes remained unchanged.

Many that tried to initiate meaningful organisational change experienced slow, numbing deflation and a sense of 'I suppose a small step is better than nothing' instead. This kind of compromise seems easier than the stubborn, slow application of transformative principles. It's a version of going-with-the-flow. However, many Rebel Leaders-to-be were overwhelmed and anxious with the frustrated knowing that this is not enough, that more is necessary. The disruptions of the past few years: environmental, political, and personal, **plus the presence of Covid-19 has made it extremely clear: lip service is not enough. Real, radical action is essential.**

Yes, but!

The density of corporate processes and the unwieldy weight of

decision-making continues to make change risky – even if only at a sub-conscious level. Many people are trying to maintain a business-as-usual attitude, resisting the opportunity to stop and reassess everything. The left-over habits of BC (Before Corona) feed the fear of putting our heads above the parapet: heads will roll, egos will flare, and profit margins may be affected!

Corporate Mindset is instinctively against the essential risks required to make a real difference. The fear of shareholder wrath, lost value and weak profit margins is deeply embedded (truth is, these losses were already happening BC and will continue AC). Ironically, disruptions make business-as-usual behaviours hold more tightly, become more risk averse and invest in more due process.

Our Staff Aren't Ready

Another aspect that prevents Corporate Mindset from embracing Rebel Leaders, is the relationship to personal power. Because business is a breeding ground for strong egos, power has become a difficult concept for people to navigate. There are complexities about the value and relevance of individual power in corporations. Rebel Leaders cultivate engagement and presence, this has innate power. Corporate Mindset is resistant to giving Rebel Leaders fertile ground because it feels like surrendering power and control.

Systemic power creates politics, mediocrity, and imbalanced dynamics. People without autonomy develop stress, anxiety and neurosis. People thrust into power positions, or those that grasp for them, become burned out. Rebel Leaders, exhausted in the system, often find themselves wrestling all these dynamics, rather than having the impact they and their organisations desire.

Within Corporate Mindset, the freedom required for full expression of unusual, potentially vital talent seems impossible. The challenge is that Now demands we rapidly adjust for the unknown and survival-innovation will be a continuing Must for a while to come. Instead of fearing the challenge of difference, organisations can find ways to open to more flow and transformation.

Truth is, Rebel Leaders just need simple frameworks and practices to activate and maintain their mojo and Corporate Mindset can learn how to embrace and mentor their value.

We Can and We Must

“We need excellence, agility, and inspired solutions. We need brave people who are prepared to lead in new ways. We need to stop losing and denying this potential.”

So much talent, skill and wisdom has long been trying to toe the line: numb from pushing against systemic obstacles; shamed or frustrated by compromise; fighting self-doubt and imposter syndrome (forgive me if this sounds dramatic.)

There is a way to reframe process, protocol, and function in corporates. Many resist the seeming complexi-

ties, but the Covid-19 catalyst washed excuses away.

Changes are the new reality and many layers of complexity need to be considered. It is possible to do so successfully and without total chaos, but it takes a mindset shift.

For this, we need to cultivate Rebel Leaders.

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