

# Leader effectiveness meets the leader

I want to share what I'm noticing in small business these days in terms of leadership, and what I say to those who ask about leader effectiveness.

First, I also want to say that I do not share client stories even with the names redacted. Agriculture is just too small, and my work with leaders is grounded in the assurance that whatever they share will never be retold.

Broadly speaking, there are many very successful businesses. They have grown significantly over the last number of years, and some consist of multiple enterprises. In short, the owners had a vision, saw opportunities, made a plan and executed it.

From the outside, things likely look pretty good, even impressive.

On the inside, not so much, and at the level of owner/COO/CEO, it's high unrelenting stress. Every circumstance is unique but there are trends:

- The farmers aren't sure what's really going and why — they have a story in their head, but it's a story.
- They don't know what the people critical to their business's success are really thinking.
- Talented people are underperforming or leaving.
- External relationships are not meeting the needs of the business.
- It's now affecting the performance of business — you can measure it in dollars.

The owners started at the bottom and learned the business, so they know at the granulated level what it takes to produce results. They still can roll under a truck and set a brake pot, operate a heavy piece of equipment like it's an extension of their body, and do the books. Except that's not their job anymore, it's someone else's and things aren't going the way they would like.

In fact, by the time I get a call there is ample evidence that the plan is at risk, even serious risk, if things don't change.

How each leader is reacting (and I do mean "reacting") to this situation is unique

to them, but falls within well understood behavioural frameworks:

- Controlling: In command and a perfectionist mentality of "my way or the highway," or "just work harder and we will get through this."
- Protecting: Heaps on the criticism, know it-all attitude, or just checks out. (This is sometimes called Easter bunny leadership, i.e. often talked about, seldom seen.)
- Complying: Full-on anti-leadership behaviours. Peace at all costs, friendship and family at the expense of results, indecisiveness, "who's really in charge?" exemplified.

Now, contrast all that with a highly effective leader:

- They are results oriented and have a clear vision, think strategically, have numbers they want to hit (and avoid), and have little or no difficulty making a decision.
- They see and operate in systems. They get that there are patterns and processes at work and that they are interconnected. They accept their responsibility to lead in

VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity).

- They work in and with relationships and can step into serious conversations without hesitation and often. In fact, they don't wait until things are serious, they constantly share their full experience as both a currency and as an example of how the human systems part of the business MUST work to make everything else work. This way of being exudes courage, authenticity and creates followership. Everyone always knows where they stand — no guessing, gossip or cringing required. They understand that part of their job is to develop and support others.
- They are resilient — the epitome of mental health. They are the mental equivalent of an endurance athlete, which means they proactively develop their mental health as an essential element of business success. They read, have a personal development plan (like their business does), and they take care of themselves through fitness, hobbies, vacations, sleep, and nutrition. Just as important, they prioritize, develop and maintain relationships that support their well-being and make them better leaders. **CG**

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## What's the difference to the business?

- Partnership: Everyone feels responsible for the success of whatever they are jointly involved in.
  - It's a business that learns: It's a place where the collective talents of its members and relationships are leveraged to do more with the resources they already have.
  - It's more profitable.
  - Developing high leader effectiveness is a game changer, the awesome sauce, and a competitive advantage — it's worth it.
  - Like their business, developing their leadership is a process, but they don't have to go it alone, nor should they.
  - What do they want to do?
- It's gratifying to work with business owners who are driven to succeed, including making themselves their next project. Their efforts will be well rewarded.