


The
LANGUAGES
of LEADERSHIP



*How to use your
words, actions
and behaviours to
influence your team,
peers and boss*

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INTRODUCTION

Sam is struggling at work. He's just been promoted to a new role as a senior leader in a large corporation and is in charge of leading about 3,000 people. The department is complex, running across the country with state-based general managers, who are in charge of their own smaller teams, now directly reporting to Sam.

Sam also has a new leader whom he dislikes, Rod. In trying to win the support of his new division, Rod has promised to fix a lot of problems, but there is a lot of chatter around the organisation about whether Rod will actually be able to deliver anything at all. Rod's leadership style is significantly different to that of Sam's previous leader and many people are talking about him being inauthentic, narcissistic and tending to 'go rogue' and off-script, promising all sorts of unrealistic things.

He is worried that his team are expecting some of their big problems to be solved by Rod. If he doesn't deliver then the relationship between Sam and his people may be at risk.

Sam has also witnessed a lot of change in roles among his peers since Rod arrived, not to mention political games and passive aggressive behaviours. It is fairly common for people to go over heads, escalate basic decision making and there's an overall lack of trust that people will deliver.

Then there's Sam's own leadership team. There are inconsistencies in the quality of service delivered across all of these

teams ranging from out-performance to underperformance. The teams also tend to do things independent of each other, with little to no collaboration. They will agree to things in meetings and then do the opposite afterwards, and they all have differing views of what success looks like for their function.

Does this scenario sound familiar?

That's because it is. It's achingly familiar across many organisations in many different industries.

Many of us have issues trying to lead disparate teams with multiple personalities, colleagues with conflicting agendas and bosses with minds of their own.

The questions we often ask ourselves are:

- How do I manage my **team** leaders to work together without having to reinvent the wheel, to learn from and leverage each other's experience without getting competitive, and to be more effective in managing the performance of their own teams?
- How do I manage my **peers** to have productive and positive relationships, to make decisions more effectively without being dragged into the detail or office politics and to be more focused putting aside individual agendas?
- How do I manage my **leader** to stop making big promises to my team that I know they won't deliver on,

to give me the space I need to get my job done and to be open to my ideas and be willing to support them?

Once upon a time, it was enough just to lead your team and that was it. But organisations today are more complex, departments are vast, reporting structures are multi-faceted. As leaders, we are expected to manage so many different relationships at so many different levels in an organisation, that it can feel as if we need multiple personalities just to stay sane.

Even if you really like your job and the people you work with, there are so many things that need to get fixed. You can see the potential of the organisation, your function and your people, if only you could all get out of the way and get things done!

Any sort of progress is like pushing an A380 aircraft with your little finger – it's hard work, overwhelming and on the verge of breaking you.

If only you could get people on board with what you are doing. If only you could get the support you need from senior leaders. If only you could get your people moving in the right direction, together. If only...

The thing is that most of this 'stuff' is out of your control.

It doesn't matter how hard you try, how much you persevere, how much you try to control the behaviours of others, with this kind of approach you will still always feel stuck. You literally have no control over other people.

You don't have control over other people, but you do have control over yourself – your words, actions, behaviours... that is, your leadership language.

Managing relationships positively, effectively and productively starts with YOU first.

There are six leadership languages you need to master to help you to manage anyone, anywhere:

- **I am an Active Leader**
 1. I am courageous
 2. I am strong
- **I am a Directive Leader**
 3. I engineer the world around me
 4. I abdicate power to others
- **I am a Perceptive Leader**
 5. I trust and am trusted
 6. I can be vulnerable.

I have worked with many leaders within some of Australia's largest organisations over the years, who have all been where you are right now. I have also been where you are now and I understand your frustration working for a leader who doesn't inspire you, and sometimes barely even notices you are there. I have worked with peers who actively seemed to work against me, and had team members who just didn't seem to care.

I have helped many leaders, just like you, overcome these obstacles by changing the way they talk and behave, because it's all within their control.

Sadly, we aren't taught this stuff in school, at work or on our MBA program. Instead, we often pick up the habits of those who have led us in the past or try and find a solution in a leadership book. The trouble is that a lot of information out there is focused mainly on the theory of leadership or leading people, but there is much more to leading than just theory.

You need simple, practical tools and techniques that you can action and implement everyday – that's what you'll find in this book. When you put all of these small changes together, that's when you get a big impact both individually and organisationally.

When you learn to balance these languages – and balance, you shall soon see is the key – you start to get yourself noticed, to manage anyone at any level and to build your reputation in the market as one of the best leaders in your industry.

That's exactly what we're going to learn to do now.

Are you ready to learn the languages of leadership?



Chapter 6

I ABDICATE POWER TO OTHERS

Dee prided herself on being a great leader. What she said she would deliver, always got delivered. What she said she would do, always got done. She saw this as one of her strengths.

Yet it wasn't without its hard work and constant management. Dee found over the years that she couldn't solely depend on others to do their job and come through with the goods. No, that would sometimes leave her exposed to risk, which she didn't like.

Dee felt that to make sure she was going to get the job done, she needed to be across the work that her people were doing. The detail and timing were critical. If she was responsible for it, then she needed to be all over it. This would make sure that delivery was on time, within budget and her stakeholders were happy.

This meant she was tired and stressed, but it was the price she happily paid for maintaining her reputation. And without her reputation, she felt she had nothing.

Sure, her people weren't overly happy working at her company. She had noticed that the engagement scores of her team had reduced for the third year in a row. The feedback from her team was that they didn't think they were learning anything, or that their ideas weren't being listened to. They also believed that they didn't have any ownership of the deliverables, and that they weren't trusted.

Well, they got that part right! Time and again Dee had been let down by people who hadn't come through on time, or were significantly over budget. She then had to go and explain this to her boss and she didn't particularly like that because it inferred that she wasn't in control of what was going on.

No wonder she was so stressed! She was always answering, directing and facilitating outcomes. It was like she was doing everyone's job as well as her own.

Do you recognise Dee? Is there someone like Dee in your workplace? Or is this person perhaps you?

Dee didn't know how to let go and abdicate responsibility to her team to have more control, influence and ownership.

Accept the way the cat is skinned

As a leader you need to let your people step up into their roles and make an active contribution by stepping back and letting them own them. This is often harder than you think!

When you are abdicating responsibility to someone else it can feel as if you are giving up complete control. Let me be clear, though, abdicating does not mean a complete *lack* of ownership on your part. As the leader you must retain overall ownership and back your people when you need to.

Abdicating power is letting go enough that you are comfortable with the outcome, even though you may not have reached the outcome in the same way.

As the saying goes, ‘there are more ways to skin a cat’ and you need to accept the way the cat is skinned. Make no mistake, this will be uncomfortable for you at first because you’re giving up a certain amount of control over the situation. That’s hard.

When your team come to you all the time for the answers to their problems and expect you to provide solutions, this says to your brain “I have value”. You feel as though you are actively contributing to getting things done. Hell, you’re the boss, isn’t that why you are here, to solve all the problems?

Like most things, though, enjoying too much of something becomes a weakness and you run the risk of getting addicted to having all the answers for everyone. Genetically we are all wired to want to feel valued as this is one of the contributing factors to our self-esteem and self-worth. But if it happens too much we become absorbed by how it makes us feel.

When you provide your people with the solution to their problems you get a shot of oxytocin and dopamine making you feel really great. You feel important, you feel needed, you’re in control.

On the reverse of this, when you micromanage your employees you are taking away their ability to control their own work.

This in turn takes away their certainty in the way they are able to manage their environment. To their brains, when you threaten their certainty this causes stress, making them less likely to be engaged, innovative and collaborative, and you will lose their respect and possibly increase their fear.

Credit in and credit out

We have all seen or worked with someone who has taken abdicating their responsibility to heart and developed it into a work ethic. This is the person who sits in a job, taking up the position, doing little, delegating everything and accepting responsibility for nothing.

Managing how much you delegate and how you empower others takes a conscious effort to make sure that you don't end up doing nothing.

Abdicating power to others should always be to the benefit of your people, your function and your organisation, for good and not evil.

It also depends on who you are dealing with to determine how to do it.

Your boss

When you are managing your boss, you sometimes need to relinquish:

- **the battle to win the war.**
Whether your boss is right or wrong, you sometimes need to let it go and accept that it is so.
- **the credit for the work you have done.**
After all, making your boss look good will usually work in your favour somewhere down the line. It's like building a line of credit for future use.
- **your good ideas.**
Sometimes, no matter how you present a good idea, some bosses just don't get it or the timing isn't quite right. Recognise when you are not getting anywhere and move on.
- **your view of success.**
When your boss has a different view of what success looks like, sometimes you need to work to her agenda.

Your peers

When it comes to your peers you may need to move away from:

- **taking the credit (again) for work you have done and this may work in your favour.**
Be mindful of never absolving yourself from responsibility to the extent that it means your peer will

be required to take the fall for something – this is not what empowering is about.

- **taking the higher ground.**

You don't always need to be better than those you work with and they may at times be smarter than you. Appreciating their skills, experience and ideas goes a long way to building rapport and trust with your colleagues.

- **going it alone.**

Actively and genuinely collaborating with your peers sends a strong message upwards and downwards throughout your organisation.

Your team

When you empower the people you lead, you can:

- **let them fail safely.**

Stepping back and supporting them when they fail is a great way for them to learn. Always ensure that you have a thorough debrief of the situation to help them understand clearly what went wrong and what they could do differently next time. This self-reflection creates new neural pathways in the brain and, with the addition of a coaching conversation to debrief, you create a much higher chance of the employee learning from it.

- **not have the solution for everything.**

This is a great way to empower your people. This means being comfortable to accept that the solution they arrive at for a problem, even though it may not have been what

you would have done or what you have tried in the past. Sometimes a solution sounds the same as something done before, however, different minds and perspectives in play will change the subtle nuances of the past play, therefore enabling a different outcome.

- **Give up the credit (again – there’s a theme here!).** Stepping back and letting your people shine and be rewarded for their hard work is a great way to show them humility, build their trust in you and reward them. When you simply thank an employee for their work you access the same mental areas of the brain that light up when a person has a financial reward. This has a very powerful impact on us mentally and it’s the easiest thing for a leader to do.

What you are trying to create by abdicating some of your power and responsibility is a culture of empowered people.

When you step back from situations you help people to share in the leadership of the function as well as accept accountability for both their mistakes and their successes. By not solving their problems for them, they also learn to think for themselves and develop their own leadership style. Your ability to create change more effectively grows, while their control over their environment increases, reducing stress and improving engagement.

Abdication also gives you the ability to create capacity in your work life and reduce your own stress. When you create capacity, you find that you have more time to focus on

additional activities like increasing your networks across the organisation, creating more time to focus on strategic issues, planning and building relationships within and outside of your team, which in turn leads to greater influence up and beyond your remit.

Put it into practice

So, what does abdication look like in practice? How can you put this technique into action?

There are three techniques you could practise:

1. Hand it over
2. Ask questions
3. Be silent.

Let's explore each.

1. Hand it over

The next time you have a problem to solve, hand it over to your team to discuss and debate and offer solutions. Here's the hard part: while they are doing this sit quietly, listen and observe.

Resist the temptation to enter the discussion or debate. This will be hard for you because our minds are constantly reviewing, assessing and developing answers and solutions to the things we see and hear. It will take a conscious effort not to get involved, but it will be worth it.

By observing and listening you will hear potential solutions that you may not have considered, enabling the creativity

and innovation of your people. You are also increasing the level of control and insight experienced by everyone, which is proven to increase wellbeing and positivity.

You may observe the dynamics at play within your team. Who contributes and who doesn't, how accepting they are of each other's ideas, how do they interact with each other?

2. Ask questions

A great technique developed by Judith Glaser in her book *Conversational Intelligence: How great leaders build trust and get extraordinary results*, is asking questions that you don't know the answer to. This is a good way to find out what people think about issues and how you can potentially tackle things differently.

You would use language like:

- “What do you think about it?”
- “How would you handle it?”
- “What are your suggestions on how to manage this?”.

These are all questions that involve someone providing you with their thoughts and suggestions that you couldn't possibly know without asking them. The key here is to ensure that you listen to what they are saying, and don't discount or discredit their suggestions. Keep an open mind and a closed mouth.

3. Be silent

All too often people will say something – anything – to fill the gap made by silence. We just can't stand waiting with our own thoughts.

I often stay silent when I facilitate meetings or discussions because of exactly that reason. When I use this technique, someone will always speak to fill the void. This is a great way to ensure that people do speak and are heard.

Practise being OK with some of the solutions that are suggested by other people. Just because it's not what you would do, doesn't mean that it's either not going to work or is simply the wrong solution. This is a great opportunity to help your people feel trusted, supported and empowered, particularly if what they suggest doesn't work. Always debrief the outcome afterwards, good or bad, and ask a question you don't know the answer to e.g. "What are your insights from how this played out?".

Using abdication in managing the relationships that you have in your workplace sets a good example to those around you.

Increasing innovation

When you take a step back from providing all the solutions, you enable those around you to step up and into their own leadership style. You are saying that you are open and accepting of their ideas and solutions, that you don't have all the answers to all the problems, and it's OK to sometimes get things wrong as long as you learn from them.

I abdicate power to others

As your team start to see that the solutions they are offering are listened to and sometimes accepted, they themselves begin to become more courageous in what they offer. This then leads to increased innovation and creativity in problem solving.

It also means less stress for you in having to provide all the answers all the time.

Remember Dee from the beginning of the chapter? Her people were unhappy, and so was he. She was stressed, overworked and in serious threat of burnout. Her people felt disempowered, not trusted, unhappy and not listened to. Her engagement scores were on a downward slide year on year – all because she wasn't prepared to abdicate some responsibility to those around her. She wasn't even prepared to try.

The aim of abdication is as much about you stepping back as it is about you enabling people to step in. It's about relinquishing some of your need for control and handing that over to someone else.

As a result, you'll help create a culture of shared responsibility, openness to new ideas and solutions, increased collaboration across functions and an increase in trusted relationships.

It's within your control to let go of control.

Just try it and see.

Step back to step up

Maria led a team of five managers who were not working together. This was a constant source of frustration for Maria, as she could see the potential in each one, and if combined it was clear they could achieve some amazing things. Maria was having trouble helping them to realise that they weren't working together. They thought they were.

Maria had to go to a conference for a week in October and asked the team to focus on maintaining the overall level of faults for the whole function so that customers were not impacted any further while she was away. This would require the team to work together to ensure that an appropriate solution was developed and implemented. She didn't think it was too hard an issue for them to solve, they just had to talk to each other. She also decided that she wouldn't get anyone to fill her role while she was away, preferring to let the team step up into their own leadership.

On her return Maria was disappointed and frustrated. The team had only focused on their own patch, which resulted in the issue not being solved and even more customers being impacted. She had to get them to see that they had to change.

Maria met with each leader individually to talk about the issue. She shared her disappointment and frustration and how she now felt that she couldn't trust them. She asked them how they could have handled the situation better. What actions could they have done in hindsight that may have helped the situation?

During the conversation, each expressed their own remorse at having let her down and could see how their behaviour was disappointing. She then spoke to them as a group, reinforcing her

disappointment and that she could see the potential in the team to really step up and into being great leaders, together.

Over the next few months, Maria continued to try to get the team to work together, always reinforcing her messages of collaboration and getting them more involved with the decision making. She started to back away from the day-to-day management of the function, seeking her leaders' input and backing the decisions they were making – even though at times she was genuinely concerned that they wouldn't work. Some of them failed, but Maria was quick to offer her support and help them to learn from the situation ensuring they knew she was there to back them.

Then came a restructure, and Maria knew this was going to be a test for the team. She brought them all together and asked them to lead the work across the function, letting them know she would be there if they needed her, but essentially, they would be leading the work themselves.

She asked them to come up with the solution for the function, and to present it to her as a stakeholder, not their leader. They worked hard together and came up with a great solution that they presented to Maria. They had met their required cost reduction and people targets allocated to them and Maria could tell they were proud of the work they had done. In the end they delivered what they needed to in a collaborative and engaging way. The test would be the engagement scores for the function.

They were all pleasantly surprised to see engagement had risen by 5% even though there was significant change experienced by the teams. By stepping back, Maria was able to help her team to step into their own leadership roles for the function, and achieve a great outcome, together.

Words to practise abdication

- ‘How would you go about solving this problem?’
- ‘What do you think we should do here?’
- ‘You have my 100% support and backing.’
- ‘I’ve also learned something here.’
- ‘How could we learn together from this situation?’
- ‘I understand what you are going through, it’s not the end of the world.’
- ‘Is there a silver lining here for us?’

Actions to practise abdication

- Step back and out of the way to let your people get on with it.
- Stay silent, don’t offer solutions or opinions to fix a problem.
Let others find their voices.
- Listen actively to what your people are saying.
- Avoid judging people when they offer alternatives to yours.
- Accept other ideas even though you are sceptical.
- Let your people fail safely rather than stepping in and saving the day.
- Accept you are not the hero.

Behaviours to practise abdication

- Are you comfortable stepping away and letting your people stand out, or are you always after the limelight?
- When was the last time one of your people failed and you comforted and supported them?
- How often do you accept the input from others and use their ideas?
- Are you constantly annoyed that your leader doesn't give you credit for the work you have done?
- Are you always fighting battles with your boss, your peers or your people?
- Do you always feel as though you need to have the answer?
- Do you need to be in control or across everything that is going on in your function?

I AM A PERCEPTIVE LEADER

I trust and am trusted

I am trusted by those who rely on me and I trust those who I need to. I know that trust is an ongoing process, not an event, and that I should never take advantage of trust. I understand that it takes time to build trust, yet it can be destroyed in an instant. I know that trust should be nurtured and cared for with seriousness and sensitivity and above all never taken for granted. I know that trust is at the heart of every relationship I have.

I can be vulnerable

I see vulnerability as a strength, not a weakness and I know it means opening up to those around me by being able to say that I'm unsure or may not know something. It also means sometimes I have to let go of control when I need to. I understand the business world is a tough environment with deeply entrenched challenges making it hard to be vulnerable. I will need to draw on my strength and courage to be vulnerable.