

“THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS”

Gord Hume...Municipal World...February 2016

“The Leadership Crisis” is an important new book for Canadian officials from all orders of government as well as people who want to better understand local government, but most especially for the elected and administrative leaders who run our towns and cities.

Gord Hume’s 6th book is an in-depth exploration of leadership talent and techniques in today’s fast-paced and complex municipal environment. Hume has developed the 7 C’s of political leadership, and these are explored in detail as part of the new book.

In this exclusive excerpt from “The Leadership Crisis”, Hume interviews Dr. Jeffrey Gandz, who has spent a lifetime studying management and leadership. He has consulted with major corporations around the world, served on corporate boards and worked for large companies. He is Professor Emeritus of Strategic Leadership at the Ivey Business School.

I started our interview with that fascinating fundamental question: are leaders born, raised or trained?

“Not surprisingly, it is a function of nature and nurture. Everybody who studies early childhood behaviour will report that there are leaders that emerge in kindergarten. There clearly are those kids who are the first to try things, who don’t necessarily accept convention, and more importantly it’s clear there are kids that other kids will follow,” says Dr. Gandz.

“Some of it is genetic, some is personality driven. It is probably formed by the time you get to kindergarten. Personality is only one element of leaders but it is the one that is most genetically driven. But what’s done with that personality, whether it is accidental or planned, shapes many other important things to our leaders. Not the least of which are values (or lack thereof). I think virtues are also learned and honed, reinforced or expunged, by experience. And then there are a set of skills that good leaders have that I think are quite learnable provided there is some aptitude there in the first place. It is the aptitude that is innate. If the aptitude is zero, the [leadership] skills won’t be developed.”

There are three key elements of leadership according to Professor Gandz and his academic colleagues: Competencies, Character and Commitment.

I believe for an analysis and understanding of political leadership, you need a fourth and a fifth: Charisma and Communication.

Professor Gandz argues for two other Cs: Context and Culture.

In summary, the book argues the 7 Cs of great political leadership are:

1. **Competencies**, including people, organizational, business and strategic.
2. **Character**, and its traits, values and virtues; integrity.
3. **Commitment**, including aspiration, engagement, perseverance and sacrifice.
4. **Charisma**, that unquantifiable attribute that political leaders either have or don't.
5. **Communication**, through effective messaging that inspires, informs and influences.
6. **Context**, an understanding of what's going on around them.
7. **Culture**, and how to develop, create, change and advance that culture.

There is no attempt to rank these seven elements. All contribute to the emergence, development and performance of a leader. Not every leader will have equal strength in all of these elements; the particularly smart leaders understand their own strengths and weaknesses and have the ability to gather skilled and smart colleagues around them to provide support for their own lesser-attributes.

A summary of each of these 7 key elements provides a solid foundation for understanding leadership today in our cities and towns, in our legislatures and parliament.

1. Competencies:

There are four leadership competencies according to Professor Gandz:

- a. People skills—learning how to read people, how to understand what makes them tick, how to press the buttons, how to get people to follow, how to get people to commit.
- b. Organizational skills—knowing how to design an organization so that it functions well, knowing how to change things in organizations (ie. Understanding how an organization works and then how to work the organization), how to achieve alignment between systems, structure, people, processes, resources.
- c. Business/function related skills—knowledge of particular business (eg. Roads and sewers for engineering). [For politicians] what you're often trying to equip leaders with is the ability to move beyond their own particular experiences. For example, the best sales person doesn't necessarily make the best sales manager. When it comes to leadership you have to be able to evaluate potential, not just performance.

- d. Strategic skills—the ability to understand your environment and the possible changes that will require you to change what you do in your organization. It is seeing beyond the horizon to see what’s developing. What we often find in [municipal] organizations is a real dearth of strategic thinking.

One way to measure a leader is to look at her/his followers. “In practical terms, the difference between a visionary and a leader is that a visionary can see the way, but the leader has the skills and other characteristics that people will follow to actually get there,” says Dr. Gandz.

The implications for political leaders like a Mayor or Councillor are apparent. Many locally elected officials falter in the early stages of their political careers because they simply don’t comprehend the intricacies of leadership competencies.

Every elected official is automatically a community leader who assumes a leadership position. Many councillors never figure that out. They don’t understand the ‘business’ side of what they’re doing: how they have to operate efficiently, how to organize their office and time or understand the often intricate interconnections inside a city hall. Most of all, many elected officials never comprehend the strategic planning and thinking that is needed to drive their issues forward.

Many of them are particularly weak in strategic skills—big thinking. Councils often get caught up in some convoluted and complex ‘strategic planning process’ that ends up a compromised mish-mash that nobody understands—especially the community. The result is often a confused or irrelevant document that is either a lengthy and unachievable wish-list of projects, or it becomes so bland that the plan provides no leadership for the community or direction inside city hall. Effective strategic plans are focused on actions and implementation.

Dr. Gandz worked closely with Jack Welch, the highly-respected CEO of General Electric, for twenty years. “He actually only did five things. Five very big, very important things that he visualized and drove through to completion. Driving something through to completion is incredibly rare. Most people get bored, and leaders bore very easily. To stay with something for the five, six, seven years it takes to drive it through is really very unusual,” he concludes.

Elected officials need to recognize the importance of improving their Competencies to better perform their duties and provide the leadership for which they were elected. “Performance is a function of ability, motivation, resources and direction,” says Professor Gandz.

Too often elected officials don’t understand this critical point. They were elected on their beliefs—then they need to learn and develop new leadership skills.

Another key element that eludes many locally elected officials is the structure of their organization. Many municipal councillors have limited or no experience in business or running companies, and don't comprehend the importance of a smoothly-functioning administrative structure.

'You look at organizations and their structures that just tear people apart because there are no clear lines of accountability,' says Professor Gandz. 'People don't know what they are supposed to be doing to make a difference. I find this very common in municipal governments. In part this is because they don't provide an appropriate buffer between the political and the administrative. The elected people are either trying to run the municipality, or the senior management don't understand how to shield their organization from the political pressures.'

'One theory of leadership and organization says that the challenge of any bureaucracy is to insulate the core from the turbulence in its environment so that the core can do its business properly. It's easy to espouse that theory. What is required in practice to do that are an incredible set of skills some of which are derived from the good side and some of which are Machiavellian,' concludes Gandz.

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For your copy of "The Leadership Crisis", go on-line to: www.municipalworld.com.

Speaking engagements are now being booked by Gord Hume to reveal the results of the national survey that was done as part of the research for this book, and to present the keys to great local leadership. Contact him at gord@gordhume.com