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Leadership and Entrepreneurship in the Hospitality Industry

Chris Sheppardson & Heather Gibson

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(G) Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited,
Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: on file.

ISBN: 978-1-906884-49-9

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Design and typesetting by P.K. McBride, www.macbride.org.uk

Cover design by Cylinder, www.cylindermedia.com

Printed by Marston Book Services, www.marston.co.uk

‘Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.’
JFK

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Preface

In difficult times, the issue of leadership and entrepreneurship always comes to the fore and is a popular area of debate. This is natural as they are both key to economic performance and being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. In today's climate, there is much money being invested into leadership development courses. The intentions behind these are very good and it is important to understand the topic so that we develop an understanding of leadership, but what does lie at the heart of the success of both leaders and entrepreneurs?

We pose this question as so much lies within the mindset and approach that these individuals bring to their business. So many leaders and entrepreneurs have a mental picture that other people just cannot see. Many times we have heard an entrepreneur make a statement 'other people might think it was a huge risk, but I thought there was an opportunity'. Peter Lederer (Chairman, Gleneagles) will often be heard asking 'what does success look like?' He is asking whether the end destination can be clearly visualised. Marc Verstringhe (founder of Catering and Allied Services International) would often describe his role as being to stand at the top of a mountain and have a clear vision across the valley below so that he could guide his team. Others in the team would stand at various points lower down on the mountain and their views would be naturally more impaired. A nice description, but the reality is that there are many, even at CEO level, who do not have a clear view. It is far harder to gain than many realise and some are in need of either glasses or a telescope. It is those with clear vision that do stand apart.

It has recently become a cliché that successful people in all fields – whether business or sport – 'play what is in front of them'. They are able to adapt to changing markets and conditions. They are able to handle setbacks and find a way forward. Why? Because they possess a clear vision of the destination that they are trying to reach and do not take their eye off this goal. Great sportsmen will often talk about visualing winning prior to playing a game. They are often trained to visualise every possibility of what could go wrong during the course of a game or race and are able to adapt to the setback and still win. It creates a positive mentality

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that allows them to handle situations because they are psychologically prepared. It is rare to find business people who do this to the same extent and most would laugh at the thought, but whether they realise it or not, they do it naturally and instinctively, and travel a similar road. Leaders and entrepreneurs see a picture that the others simply cannot.

Of course, it is not just about visualisation and positive mental attitude. This is too simple. It takes some very special traits. Often very talented individuals never fulfil their potential for the reason that they do possess the most important inner traits – courage, conviction, or work ethic. Many can talk a good line and be strategic, but few can deliver in reality.

The following text asks: What are the stories that stand behind successful leaders and entrepreneurs and what can be learn from their stories? The hospitality industry is an excellent forum for reviewing this question, for so many of its leaders are self-made; characters that have built great careers from humble beginnings.

This book is about the psychology that lies behind leaders and entrepreneurs, for without the right mindset, all theoretical concepts on the subject become less valid. The book illustrates that the stories of successful leaders and entrepreneurs are often down to their personal qualities: hard work, tenacity, courage, passion that creates a mental picture of the world. Above all, these people are individuals: human, but flawed at the same time; compassionate, inspirational individuals. These characteristics are especially a feature of people in the hospitality industry and there are many lessons in the individual stories we tell, and common themes that we can draw from all of them.

The following is the result of over 100 conversations with industry leaders and entrepreneurs, and the key message lies with their individual stories.

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Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of several years of discussion with some of the hospitality industry's most successful leaders and entrepreneurs, largely through interviews in EP Business in *Hospitality* magazine (formerly *En Passant* magazine). During this time many people have been involved in contributing articles which are featured in this book, and the authors wish to thank: Sally Houston, David Coubrough, Rachel Brown, Christian Delteil, Jennifer Miller and Mark Lederer.

For their images we wish to thank Susannah Fields and Joanne Aldridge.

Finally, the authors wish to acknowledge the ongoing support 'behind the scenes' of Suzanna Hunter, Nick Sheppardson, Karl Schorman and Nick Metcalfe.

Structure of this book

This book has two main sections: *Leaders* and *Entrepreneurs*. Each section has an introductory outline of the authors' view on leadership and entrepreneurialism, followed by a series of real-life profiles and interviews with hospitality professionals. The profiles are a combination of those specifically written for this book and interviews adapted from *EP Magazine*. The book ends with a section, *The leader and the entrepreneur*, which concludes the lessons that can be learnt from the profiles.

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Introduction

So many admire, and aspire to be, leaders and entrepreneurs. This is understandable and as natural as it can be. Leaders and entrepreneurs set the tone of society. It is easy to admire those that possess courage and conviction. Their lives appear – rightly or wrongly – to have more meaning and to be able to leave a legacy that others will remember. It is natural for everyone to want their lives to have a positive impact.

So what does it require?

Much has been written over the years about leadership and entrepreneurship. Some has been thought provoking and insightful. But often the studies are misleading. There is an old belief that 90% of people are frightened of failure and this creates barriers that prevent real success. Maybe it is as straightforward and simple as this – that leaders and entrepreneurs stand in the 10% but if this is the case, why is it that they are able to find the courage the lack of which hinders others? Of course, the reality is more complex and this will be illustrated in the featured case studies.

There are many people who possess natural talent but are unable to turn that into something meaningful. Why? The hard truth is that they do not have the necessary character traits needed that allows them to reach the pinnacle. We can write and discuss leadership and entrepreneurship. We can aspire to the qualities required but very, very few are able to achieve this status for it requires some very rare qualities.

The aim of the following study is to look at exactly what is required. What is it that drives leaders and entrepreneurs? Are they natural or created?

Once we have completed the following journey, I suspect we will find that success is determined by character traits that are not unique to either leaders or entrepreneurs but are important traits that serve to determine success.

So why is there a need for another book on the subject? There are two good reasons.

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First, many of the theories are exactly that – theories, but leadership and great entrepreneurship is not theoretical. It is real and our journey is to discover the reality of leadership and entrepreneurship. It cannot be taught and few can turn themselves into either leaders or entrepreneurs.

What these two groups possess is something that makes them stand apart and this is worth truly understanding. The following is based on over 100 conversations with some of the greatest and best from the hospitality industry.

Second, the leaders and entrepreneurs that live within the hospitality arena are quite special characters. This book will look at the characters that stand behind the real achievements.

The hospitality industry is made up of all types of leader. There are those that have risen from the lowest levels through hard work and a high work ethic. Often these are larger than life characters, flawed but real. There are also those that have come via more traditional routes – universities and business schools. But wherever they have come from, they have had to lead businesses that rely on the skills of its people, not just the asset base.

Food is an emotive business. A great restaurant relies on a great chef. This cannot be manufactured. It relies on skill. What makes a great restaurant manager is how they make their customer feel and the service delivered. It is hard to train. It requires empathy and subtlety. A great hotel relies on groups of varied, skilled individuals who come together as one. Leaders, therefore, need to harness teams.

The hospitality industry is also no longer a Cinderella business. It is now world class. London is seen by many as the leading culinary city in the world. It possesses some of the greatest hotels, chefs, sommeliers, and companies that can compete with any. There are lessons to be learnt from this industry and some very good case studies and examples. In the following, we will look at the personal stories of some of the best. As the old saying goes, 'it is always best to learn from the best'.

Chapter extract

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