



The connected leader

A big personality is no longer synonymous with great leadership and business success.

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Management books are filled with case studies charting the rise and fall of rock star CEOs whose personal brands were as strong as their company's.

Their personal stories mirror the wider Zeitgeist of society. The corporate excesses of the 1980s and 1990s and the crashes and scandals of the 2000s all affected how governments, shareholders, boards, and consumers felt about how companies should be run, giving rise to CEOs who were of their time.

Today, we know that being a corporate celebrity rarely makes someone a great leader. Many formerly revered business personalities are remembered more for their mistakes than their successes. They

may have been good CEOs at some point, but they were never great—for all their self-aggrandisement, they failed to lead their businesses towards the sustained success we strive for today.

That's why more and more Australian boards are rejecting the traditional alpha personality when sacking and appointing, preferring leaders who take a holistic view of leadership and success that still focuses on achieving results, but not at the expense of people and values.

This is the very essence of what my company, Maximus International, calls a Connected Leader—a leader for our times. To support the idea, we have developed a new management philosophy that distils what it takes nowadays to move from being a good leader to being a great one.

THE CONNECTED LEADER

Leads with authenticity—connected to themselves

Just 13 per cent of employees trust business leaders to be truthful; winning over the cynical majority requires a leader who resonates. The ideal is someone who balances their head and their heart when making decisions, engages the people they lead, and is totally credible and authentic.

The Connected Leader sincerely empathises with all employees, cares about the community, and is passionate about achieving the best outcomes for everyone. They want the company to succeed, not for egotistical reasons but to create sustainable value that benefits all stakeholders.

To demonstrate their empathy, they mine their life experiences for relevant personal stories and share them. They strive for a balance of honesty and intimacy while being true to themselves and avoiding the over-sharing that can undermine leadership.

They accept that their authenticity must be founded on values that they live 24/7, genuine rather than expedient, and that trust can be lost at any time.

Leads with vision—connected to the future

The Connected Leader has a clear idea of what they want their legacy to be and how it will benefit everyone. They work out what they want to achieve for themselves and their organisation, then motivate and direct people to support these goals.

When unnecessary detail threatens to obscure the vision, they cut through distractions and get people back on track. They are familiar with the relevant facts, trends, and data, but they don't get lost in minutiae.

They create a compelling narrative to sell the vision that is fact based but stirs emotions. It helps people to see beyond today's challenges to tomorrow's success, understand how to get there, and envisage the role they will play in that future.

Connected Leaders understand that to achieve this vision, there may have to be trade-offs. They have integrity and purpose, but they are also realistic.

Leads with impact—connected to people

The Connected Leader creates a culture that thrives on mutual trust, collaboration, and respect, championed by a CEO who is visible, accessible, and humble.

They model openness, humility, courage, and vulnerability; help other executives

to do the same; and understand that two-way feedback is an essential tool for recognising and breaking ingrained behaviours in themselves and others.

Knowing that CEOs cast a long shadow over the workplace, they seek to guide, mentor, and persuade rather than control so that working with them is a positive experience.

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Always humble, this new kind of leader does not take the credit for personal or corporate success, instead crediting their good fortune to a great support team or other influences outside themselves. Conversely, when things do not work out, they accept total responsibility.

Leads high performance—connected to results

Connected Leaders are strongly goal oriented, have high performance standards, and are commercially astute. When obstacles and hard decisions arise, they confront reality and do what is required but never compromise on people or values; they know these two things are the bedrock on which high-performance organisations are built.

Understanding the proven connection between exceptional business results and a workplace where innovation, empowerment, and cross-border collaboration are encouraged, they remove bureaucratic and cultural obstacles to risk-taking, and treat failures as learning experiences. They do not eschew discipline and rules altogether, but seek a balanced control framework that fosters entrepreneurial spirit.

They support the idea of employee relationships that are built on

unconditional acceptance, loyalty, and commitment to one another rather than on contractual obligations—a place where people look forward to going to work and feel they are part of a community that is moving towards a single, meaningful vision.

Leads purposeful change—connected to transformation

They may be self-effacing and humble, but Connected Leaders have steely resolve. They accept there will be challenges and difficult decisions along the way, but they never lose faith in themselves or their people to attain their mutual goal. They know their unusual combination of attributes may appear paradoxical to other people, but they are happy to live with it.

Whatever it takes to generate the desired outcome, they do it, however hard it is and even if it goes against what others think. They make big, bold moves in the face of internal and external doubt because they have absolute faith it is the best thing to do in the long term.

For the Connected Leader, there is no silver bullet or overnight transformation. They believe the key to success is consistent, sustained effort focused on a clear vision of the future.

For them, innovation, agility, and a positive attitude to change are essential components of a successful company. They build these capabilities in their organisation and back radical ideas even if others do not support them.

However, they do not believe in constant change and annual restructures; their approach is to keep moving forwards, step by planned step, until critical mass is achieved, the breakthrough moment occurs, and the goal is in sight. They are confident this is the only way to build an enduring, sustainable enterprise. ■