



# The Corporate Citizen

*A sense of duty to stakeholders should be cast into a business' DNA. This can happen, writes **Charlie Wagstaff**, Managing Director of Executive Membership at Criticleye, provided the leadership has integrity and purpose*

A lack of trust in big business continues to be a serious problem. Public scrutiny in financial services, media, retail and energy companies only serve to reinforce scepticism about what really goes on in the boardrooms of global organisations.

The steady procession of corporate failures shows why high standards of governance and good internal controls are necessary. They also raise questions about the flow of information in the digital age and how the balance of power has shifted to consumers, along with other stakeholders.

Beyond any shadow of a doubt, greater transparency from companies is needed if trust is to be restored. On one level, this has had a dramatic effect on corporate communication strategies. Boilerplate statements and marketing slogans will be torn apart in the bear pit of social media if there are inconsistencies with business practices.

Perhaps more interestingly, it's reshaping opinions about what is meant by good leadership. Communication is now a core skill for leaders, whether it's with fellow executives and colleagues, customers, suppliers, the media or regulators.

The so-called 'Heroic CEO', who runs an organisation based on hierarchy and, in effect, their own ego, increasingly lacks the skills to drive long-term, high performance. It's a style of leadership born amidst the sweat and toil of the industrial revolution and is completely inappropriate for the 21st Century.

To lead successfully, a different mindset is required, one that shows

*“ Our leadership status should be driven by what we contribute to society, not what we take ”*

awareness and an ability to engage with others. How else can you be expected to build teams which can overcome the strategic, operational and cultural complexities faced by global companies?

This terrain demands leadership as more of a 'network phenomenon', requiring an ability to collaborate, leverage shared resources and 'influence' as opposed to 'tell'.

It's about setting the parameters of the strategic vision and demonstrating both IQ and EQ in equal measure. In a world where the revenue of many corporates outstrips the GDP of countries, it is vital leaders understand the value of communication and are able to listen to what different stakeholders have to say.

It's an ethos which must be embedded into organisations, otherwise decision making will remain slow and centralised.

There is no simple answer or quick solution when it comes to how to make this happen in an organisation with thousands of employees, spread

across multiple territories. Rather, it is a constant process of learning and evolution, where leaders and senior executives embrace experiences that stretch understanding and open themselves up to new perspectives.

To create the necessary conditions of a true Corporate Citizen, the following needs to be achieved:

## 1 LEADERSHIP AUTHENTICITY

Leadership is about the taking time to assist and empower others. Senior executives need to show they understand who they really are, while aspiring towards greatness and inspiring greatness in others (not egocentric greatness – this is aspiration in the sense of high self-worth, not net-worth). Only then can we really be a true visionary and a great leader and take people on a journey.

Having a firm grasp of who you are, your capabilities, and what is achievable, means it is difficult for anybody to say or do something that aggravates you, as you are self-confident and open minded. And don't forget: the negative emotions that come with holding a grudge, or dedicating vast amounts of time to something you do not believe in, have devastating health consequences.

There is also a recognition that one person doesn't have all the answers. Collaboration and diversity of thought are welcomed and, importantly, there is a willingness to embrace new experiences.

Overarching all of this, is the ability to show consistency between words and actions. ►

## 2 EMBRACE CHANGE

Fear of change is a major threat to success. The role of leadership is to actively participate in enabling and facilitating transformation by influencing and guiding others.

This can be extremely challenging, especially in organisations where there is a traditional, established business to maintain as a new model is introduced and scaled up using different KPIs and metrics. In fact, as those in retail, financial services and the media sector know all too well, managing such a transition will provide the ultimate test of leadership as roles and responsibilities, not to mention company culture, are redefined.

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is that they don't act quickly enough. Even when the right decision is made, organisational design, established hierarchies and bureaucracy can make it feel almost impossible to execute effectively.

Such barriers have to be broken through. Across an organisation, change must be seen as the sign of a healthy, ambitious business adapting to fast-moving markets.

## 3 KEEP YOUR VALUES

Mindfulness – of self and others – may very well be the single most important trait of a successful company and being a Corporate Citizen. Equally, acknowledging everything you do, both inside and outside work, will set the tone of your leadership and the values of your organisation.

*“The goal should be to work within processes which generate self-fulfilment through mutual success”*

If there is a stated commitment to diversity, live it. Cherry-picking candidates from brand universities, going to the same small group of headhunters, will not create diversity of thought within an organisation. Hire for track record and potential and be creative in where you look for talent.

It is also worth noting that not everyone needs to be a superstar in the sense of wanting to be the next CEO. Spend time listening and give a team what they need to succeed. The closer everyone in the organisation comes to achieving his or her potential, the more successful the business will be. Such cultures encourage employees to refresh their skills and keep learning.

Real values will mean everyone in the workforce knows how the business can make a difference – there is a shared sense of responsibility and accountability.

As true Corporate Citizens, money is not what we are measured by. Our leadership status should be

driven by what we contribute to society, not what we take.

Work should act to reinforce personal integrity and benevolence by providing a rich experience for individual and collective learning. The more the working environment become values-led and life-enhancing, the more alive the organisation and the more aligned we become and productive we all should be.

Too often, process and self-interest take over. When that happens in a large businesses, it results in siloes and divisions. Ultimately, the goal should be to work within processes which generate self-fulfilment through mutual success. ■

*‘Learn how to see. Realise that everything connects to everything else’*  
Leonardo Da Vinci

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*Charlie's involvement, since the inception of Criticaleye, combined with his diverse industry background, gives him a unique understanding of the challenges and leadership issues facing today's global senior executives. As well as being a Board Mentor, he chairs/facilitates strategy discussion groups and Retreats. Prior to Criticaleye, he was based in Africa (Zimbabwe and RSA) as Director, Operations and HR, for CDC Capital Partners.*

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