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GLS20 Session 2

DR TOMAS CHAMORRO-PREMUZIC: Six Traits Leaders Typically Lack During Crisis

The following are notes from Dr Tomas' talk at #GLS20. Use them to help you apply the content you learned at the Summit.

During the pandemic there has been a great deal of speculation as to what type of leader is most needed to manage or handle a crisis. Over the past 100 years, there's been a lot of research comparing the profiles of effective leaders in different circumstances. During this session, organizational psychologist, Dr. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic answered this question and challenged us to develop six critical traits needed to thrive in uncertain times.

- Throughout the history of leadership research, scientists and scholars have shown the success and effectiveness of a leader is partly, and sometimes largely, dependent on the context or situation the leader is in.
- There are some exceptions—leaders who are amazing in any situation.
- There are some leaders that seem to be bad in every situation—when changed from one environment into another, they still don't deliver in a competent way.
- For the vast majority of people, their leadership effectiveness and success will be dependent on the situation they're in.
- It is normal and logical that we ask the question of not just whether the pandemic or a crisis calls for a different type of leadership, but whether we have to throw away and completely revise what we know about leadership in order to accommodate the current circumstances

STORY | Winston Churchill:

- He was a great wartime prime minister but useless when peaceful times came.
- It's been said in peaceful times, the aggressive or violent man makes war with himself.
- He was too combative, too blunt, too bold, too aggressive to preside over his country when times were good.

What type of leader is really needed for a crisis?

- What type of leadership profile, qualities or competencies do we need when the situation is high stakes, unprecedented, or we have to manage a very complex and stressful time?
- Over the past 100 years, empirical and quantitative research compares the profile of more and less effective leaders in different circumstances..

6 Important Attributes Leaders Need To Have In Order To Manage Or Navigate A Crisis:

1. Intelligence

- The ability to learn quickly to reason obstructively and to make rational, data driven decisions.

- More important than ever when leaders cannot rely on their past experience or expertise.
- A crisis is a time or a period of traumatic transition where the old is not dead yet and the new is not quite ready to move in.
- Smart leaders tell people and guide others through this traumatic transition—that can only happen if you, as a leader are capable of making smart and logical decisions.
- You don't have to be the smartest person in the room. When leaders think that they have to be the smartest person in the room or behave as if they were, it typically doesn't have healthy or successful consequences.
- Have the intelligence to hire intelligent people and build teams made of people who are smart and data driven with strong mental horsepower.

STORY | David Ogilvy:

David Ogilvy is a marketing and advertising tycoon of the sixties and seventies, who said his only onboarding protocol or ceremony ritual when somebody joined his firm was to give them a Russian doll—a babushka doll—and say, “Look, this is my only advice for you. If you hire people who are smarter than you and bigger than you, at some point, we will become a company of giants. But if you only hire people who are less smart, less competent, less talented than you very quickly we'll become a company or an organization of dwarfs.”

Pay attention to other people's cleverness and intelligence.

STORY | Amos Tversky:

A psychologist in Israel who won the Nobel Prize for economics, Amos Tversky, was reportedly so smart his colleagues and university coined the Tversky Intelligence tests. They said, “When you meet and speak to Tversky, the sooner you realize that Tversky is smarter than you, the smarter you probably are.”

When leaders think they're the smartest person in the room, they will make avoidable mistakes, underrate and underestimate others' intelligence—especially when they don't think like themselves.

2. Intellectual Curiosity

- When leaders are not curious, they get stuck in their own ways and become intellectually conservative, doing things in their specific way, stubborn, and arrogant.
- It's hard to persuade a leader to change their mind, especially when they combine high intelligence with low curiosity.
- If you have somebody who isn't the fastest mind and the fastest learner, but they're curious, there is more hope that person gets better.
- Curiosity means having a hungry mind, high levels of learnability, experiencing a sense of discomfort when you know you don't know something.
- Being aware of what you don't know is really important, but it's also important that the knowledge gap or the gap in the difference between what you know and what you would like to know makes you feel a little bit uncomfortable so you work hard to close it.
- Not closing the curiosity gap around things that might not be considered, sustainable and nutritious food for your hungry mind, but more fast food.
- Have a deeper appetite to ask why, to have a critical way to explore problems, to scratch under the surface and understand how things really work.
- We have a certain baseline of curiosity that tends to cement around the age of 20. Curiosity does continue to change and develop as we grow older. Sadly, for most people, it tends to go down as they grow older.
- One of the most effective ways to predict whether somebody is made a leader or not is whether they are old enough and more and more, we keep on selecting leaders because of their maturity and experience.
- The older you are the naturally less curious you become.
- In order to keep developing your curiosity, you need to go against the default tendency that we have to try to understand the world in a certain way and not question it anymore.
- Go outside your comfort zone and ask uncomfortable questions.

STORY | Social Media:

Over the last 5 or 10 years we have blamed social media for creating the filter bubble we live in and as if algorithms and artificial intelligence are to blame. The filter bubble exists because humans love to live in a world where everything seems certain and predictable, but that also makes us less curious.

To work on your curiosity is to exit your filter bubble

- Hang out with people who don't think like you.
- If you're a leader, that also means not hiring just for culture fit or on your own image, but actually embracing people who are cognitively diverse, who think differently, who can speak up on certain issues and provide a different perspective on things, which is how you avoid groupthink and how you avoid this systemic bias that comes when everyone sees the world in the same way.
- A lot of organizations simultaneously say they value diversity, but that they love to hire on culture fit.

STORY | Travel:

Before COVID-19, people travelled and enjoyed going places. For those who haven't, they've missed traveling for one very important reason. When you go to a new place, you develop curiosity, and see things from a different culture's perspective. There is an understanding of what models and routines people follow to understand there are more ways to behave, think and feel.

3. Humility

- If leaders don't have humility, it's very hard that they actually develop some curiosity. If they don't have curiosity, it's very hard that they develop expertise and that they become or act in a smarter way.
- Humility is being aware of your limitations.
- Humility is being aware you are not as good as you think,
- You shouldn't automatically underestimate others and overestimate yourself.
- We live in a funny world really because we've been praising humility especially in leaders for about two decades.
- If you ask the average person on the street, "is it important that a leader has humility?" They will look at you and say, of course—yet, if you analyze the profile of the typical leader in politics or business, or any organizations, including sports, military, and religious organizations, there are not often found to have a reputation for being very modest and very humble, especially when, what we seem to prefer in a leader is that they have this magnetic, charismatic quality that enables them to entertain, perform and behave in a way that is closer to the self-importance pole of the spectrum than the modest and humility pole.
- There are cultural differences in this as well.

STORY: Origin

- I was born and raised in Argentina where they say they seem genetically incapable of humility.
- They are pre-wired for overconfidence and arrogance—neighbors know this very well.
- Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, or Brazil, this is not news to you.
- I moved to the UK to study for my PhD, where an academic career began.
- Notice if Argentines are genetically pre-wired for arrogance and overconfidence, in the UK, they are culturally predetermined to fake modesty and humility.
- 7-8 years of living in the USA caused a rewire of models on how to present yourself and think about yourself.
- In the USA the cultural pressure is to fake confidence and arrogance to the point that you have to believe that you're amazing even if there is not much data or feedback to back it up.
- It is important as a leader to cultivate humility.
- Long term success depends on it and your ability to handle or manage a crisis is largely dependent on how humble you are.
- A crisis is a complex, unprecedented and difficult situation.

- If you overestimate your ability to deal with it, and you exude a false sense of optimism and security to others, it's not good for you or for the group.
- Know your limitations, and also understand that being aware of your limitations isn't a weakness. In leadership it's a true sign of strength.

How Can You Cultivate Humility?

- You need a little bit to be able to cultivate more of it. If you have none it's very difficult.
- People who are deluded to the point of being narcissistic are not coachable and you often do find them in leadership roles.
- There are ways in which you can cultivate a reputation for showing you are not the hero in your own mind to others, and that as a leader, you don't think your opinion is the most important thing in the world.
- Create the conditions around you so others can provide you with negative, critical, constructive feedback on your performance

STORY | Amy Edmondson

Amy talks about psychological safety—an important construct to show the best ways in which leaders can cultivate their humility and their curiosity is to create their conditions in their teams and organizations for others to provide them with negative feedback.

- Simple nudges can help you implement critical feedback.
- If you've given a presentation, had a client deal or finished a report, and are asking for feedback from your team, don't ask them, "Wasn't I great?" or "Isn't this amazing?" Ask questions encouraging them to provide critical feedback helping you to improve.
- What would you have done better?
- If you could have changed one thing about my report, my presentation, the way it did this, what would that thing be?
- What are the two or three things that you think I could have done better and why?
- If you encourage people to do it and don't punish them for speaking up, but reward them, you will simultaneously become more self-critical and more humble, understanding your limitations.
- If you don't understand your limitations and that there is a gap between the person you are and the person you want to be you, you for sure won't continue developing as a leader.

4. Resilience

- As leaders you don't need to be a kind of a Buddhist monk or in Zen like level of emotional coolness, super phlegmatic and non-reaction; work with what you've got.
- All of your emotions are amplified in a crisis.
- In a crisis, all of your followers, subordinates and direct reports are looking at you for guidance on how they should behave.
- If you are experiencing anxiety, that's okay but expressing that anxiety instead of trying to control it or to hide it will make it a cascade onto others and will make it contagious.
- Resilience is not difficult to develop and cultivate it during a crisis—it's a muscle that doesn't get exercise a lot when everything is going well.
- Exercise that muscle and ensure it doesn't go passive or dormant.
- Ensure you have meaning, purpose and a higher sense of calling and that you discipline yourself and engage in routines that actually keep your levels of emotional stability up and your levels of anxiety down.

What are you going to do to cultivate resilience when the crisis is over and times are good?

- It's easy to learn from failure. Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted to get. Or good judgment comes from experience, which comes from bad judgment.
- The hard thing is to learn and become stronger from your successes.
- Nietzsche says, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." We're all going to be stronger or strengthened by adversity and a crisis.
- What are you going to do to ensure that you keep developing and becoming stronger, even

when times are good?

5. Empathy

- Humans are simultaneously capable of logic and rationality, but also influenced by emotions and feelings more than facts.
- The ideal leader needed for a crisis is somebody who is smart, curious, rational, and capable of making logical and data driven decisions, but doesn't seem cold, aloof and robotic.
- Nobody wants to follow a robot, which is why even if artificial intelligence keeps developing fast and more rapidly than it has so far, we will still crave human affection, human validation and empathy in our leaders.

What Is Empathy?

- The ability to understand and care about what other people are thinking and feeling.
- As a leader you have the responsibility to develop more and more empathy as part of your leadership development journey.

How do you do this?

- Pay attention to what other people feel and care about their point of view.
- Understand if you disagree with someone or don't understand them, it's probably because you haven't thought hard about their perspective.
- Know if you are making decisions that might seem blunt, abrupt, cold and not kind and caring enough, that's going to be much more damaging to others and your reputation as a leader during a crisis where people need a lot of validation and a lot of reinforcement.
- The hardest thing for managers to do in this crisis has been to manage via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Hangouts, BlueJeans or video conferencing.
 - For the first time, you totally remove physical and analog interaction between a manager and an employee.
 - We think we can see emotions through Zoom, but it's an artificial version.
 - If you're managing remotely check in on people as often as possible and don't be afraid of seeming kind and caring.

6. Integrity

- If you don't have leaders in charge who are honest, ethical and moral, all of the other qualities will be either irrelevant or even backfire.
- A leader who is smart, who can understand others well and who seems cold and composed, lacking integrity, is a recipe for disaster for everyone else.
- You have to have the ability to control your short-term temptations, your impulses and make decisions for the benefit of others, other than yourself.
- Leadership is fundamentally a resource for the group, for the team, for the organization, for society and for the nation.
- It's a privilege to be in charge, but as a leader, you have the responsibility to not misuse that power and that responsibility and make decisions that have the interest of the collective at heart.
- Your reputation for integrity, for being ethical and being moral can be harnessed and has to be harnessed on a daily basis

How Can You Do This?

- Ensure you practice what you preach—you put your money where your mouth is. You are consistent, you are clear, transparent and fair about what your moral values and your ethical code of conduct is, and you hold yourself accountable, even when others don't.
- You will be remembered long term by whether you were an honest leader or not.
- People, societies, organizations and cultures are generally better off when their leaders are smart, kind and honest.
- If we need this crisis to remind us it's because the majority of leaders don't have these six qualities

ASK YOURSELF 3 QUESTIONS:

1. What you could have done differently to prepare your team, your organization and your followers for this crisis and to have ensured that they went into this unexpected and unpredictable crisis being stronger and better prepared?
2. What would you have done differently if you could go back in time and cultivate strength in your team so that they are more resilient and immune to this difficult crisis in time?
3. What are you going to do to ensure people, followers, teams, and organizations are going to emerge stronger after this?
 - Two Distinct Phases/Stages In Any Crisis:
 - Shock Absorption: To ensure everyone is fine, healthy, okay and able to resist the initial impact of the crisis.
 - Leverage: Use the crisis to emerge stronger

There's no excuse for not building the qualities of team effectiveness that will be needed to emerge stronger in the future short term and long term.

What are you going to do to improve and increase your critical six leadership qualities?

- What are you going to do to grow your intelligence, to improve your curiosity, your humility, your resilience, your empathy and your integrity? What are you going to do to increase it in others?
- The fundamental goal of leadership is not just to better yourself, but to make others better.
- Leaders have the potential to not just improve other people but develop these six traits so that next time we have a crisis, we don't have to ask this question.