



Visionaries, psychics, spiritual guides – you’d be surprised to know how many successful leaders rely on spiritual coaches for advice and guidance. **Georgina Fuller** finds out if the key to great leadership could really be inside a crystal ball...

“LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY DO GO HAND IN HAND. ITS ABOUT A STRONG SENSE OF SELF”

Leadership and spirituality – not necessarily two terms or concepts you would ever put together. The very word spirituality can evoke strong feelings and divisive attitudes. It may conjure up images of charlatans (clairvoyants and palm readers to name a few), the Pope or the magnificent Dalai Lama, depending on your outlook and points of reference.

The actual language can be the first obstacle in the debate about leadership and spirituality, says Victor Marino, spiritual coach and founder of People Centred Learning consultancy. “Language

builds opinions which become mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. Spirituality is a loaded term for some, and sacrosanct for others and therefore can separate us before the debate even starts,” he notes.

The root of the word spirituality, says Marino, originates from Latin and can be described as a “vital spark” or animating a vital principle – “spiritus.” “There is one outstanding key in the definitions and that is the term spirare – meaning to breathe,” Marino explains. “This opens the door to discovery of how spirit manifests on a very personal level and, more importantly, what to do about it.”

Douglas Ballard, an international visionary and healer, otherwise known as a psychic, believes that leadership and spirituality should actually be synonymous. “Spirituality is not to be confused with the psychic arts,” he points out. “However, leadership and spirituality do often go hand in hand. Spirituality is about a strong sense of self. Those who have a strong sense of self can lead others.”

In this feature we take a look at three different types of unconventional spiritual leadership guides and how they work with managers to help them tap into their inner strengths. ■

THE PSYCHIC DOUGLAS BALLARD, INTERNATIONAL VISIONARY AND HEALER

There is, according to Ballard, a clear space for ‘visionaries’ in the workplace and they can usually help address the recurring issues that hold managers back – namely, confidence and positivity.

“Managers are at the receiving end of pressure from bosses and lack of support from those below which can create a demoralizing work environment,” he notes. “Too many managers fail to be sustainably engaged by endless rafts of sales trainers, consultants or training courses which can be generic in their nature and limited in their lasting effects,” he argues.

A good visionary will work with a manager on a one-to-one basis and start by proving his or her ability, Ballard says. This process should typically entail the psychic telling the manager about their life, their working habits, how they are perceived by colleagues and outlining their core strengths and values.

If this is accurate, says Ballard, it creates the ultimate trust between the manager and the psychic. “This is where the process becomes interesting and creative as the visionary can then show the manager the pathway, potential and strategy for overcoming the hurdles, while instilling a sense of motivation and enthusiasm.

It’s a case of ‘if I can prove to you what happened in the past and what your current situation is, I must be right about

the future’,” Ballard explains.

“I’ve seen managers over the years achieve the most tremendous career milestones once they have connected with their true inner self-belief. If a visionary can make this connection a lot earlier in managers’ careers we would have a much happier and more productive workforce,” he notes.

Once the psychic has given his or her overview of the business, the managers and owners can then ask very specific

questions for which they should be able to receive automatic and precise answers.

“The kinds of questions I get asked in this scenario range from, ‘will the business be a success in the future?’ to ‘how can I improve the productivity of my staff?’, ‘Should we expand, and how?’, ‘What do we have to do to be top of our game?’, among many others,” Ballard explains.

This part of the consultation is often the most useful and insightful, once the path to the future has been laid, according to Ballard. “I frequently get called upon when a company or entrepreneur is about to close a major deal to advise how to best manage the process. It’s the extra layer of support and confidence that’s essential at these highly crucial moments.”

Ultimately, however, it is down to the manager or leader to make things happen for themselves. “I have to keep reminding my clients that their destiny is still in their hands. They still need to do the work. It’s not a lottery and there’s often much work to do – everyone has a part to play – however I see the potential of the pathway (or not), and this is what I share.”



CASE STUDY: AQUAVIBE

Adrian Walters, founder and director of Aquavibe, which he describes as an “all-body sensory experience combining the floating sensation of a water bed, extraordinary lighting and deep vibration through sound,” met with Douglas Ballard last October at their studio in Canary Wharf, London. Ballard gave Walters a reading two months later where he told Walters that the business was not working as effectively as it could and that he needed to get rid of ‘dead wood’. Ballard also told Walters he needed to push the business forward and predicted extensive travel and developments in the overseas market.

“In essence, the reading provoked change, which subsequently promoted

the business to move into different areas outside of the current market,” says Walters. “I changed my business partner, I pushed forward in promoting Aquavibe and I launched a new business in Ibiza. We are now heading to Dubai as the Ibiza season is practically over.”

Part of Aqua Vibe’s new marketing strategy was to be installed in a location of high celebrity traffic, so they formed a partnership with Ibiza Rocks House at Pikes Hotel, renowned for its popularity amongst celebrities.

Walters subsequently succeeded in getting a number of testimonials and endorsements from several high profile celebrities including actor and singer Idris Elba, band Rudimental and

DJ Paul Oakenfold.

“What Douglas gave me was guidance on my path, and exactly the right degree of assurance I needed to move my business forward,” Walters says. “He gave me something far more powerful than positive predictions (which he did as well) and that was the gift of being able to trust, and to allow myself to be led by my gut instinct.”

However, Walters warns that psychics have to be used in the right way and in the right context.

“Too many people use psychics the wrong way - hang on their every word and in essence get disempowered by relying on them too much,” he notes.

THE MINDFUL COACH GAIL GIBSON, COACH AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER



Mindfulness is definitely one of the current buzzwords in business but it's worth remembering, says Gibson, that it's certainly not a new concept. "Mindfulness has been around for centuries, practised by Buddhists as a key part of their spiritual teaching and system of beliefs," she notes. But what does it mean in today's terms and to today's leader? "From my perspective, mindfulness equates to being aware of yourself, your environment and how vital it is to approach life in an improved state of awareness, especially from a wellbeing perspective," Gibson explains.

She believes that mindful leadership is essential in today's business world. "We live and work in a chaotic age, where for many, our lives are consumed by technology and the human need to be connected 24/7," she says. "From a business perspective, this ever-present state of busy-ness can be counter-productive to the performance of individuals and teams within organisations." When, Gibson asks, do we get the chance to switch-off from all the noise? When are we given permission to visit our inner self, to reconnect in a quiet, still environment?

Organisations as a whole, not only managers, must take a responsible and positive approach towards empowering their people to become more mindful, Gibson believes, to give them the skills to become more aware of themselves and the consequences of their actions and behaviour. "By encouraging and developing more mindful people, organisations can activate a positive state of wellbeing that is conducive to greater efficiency and productivity, together with better performance and much happier people," she says.

So what sort of guidance can a mindful leader typically provide to a business and how can this help them grow? "Our primary concern is to develop mindful leaders who can initiate the cultivation of focus, clarity and creativity among their managers, to enable them to grow and become 'in the moment' mindful managers."

Good leadership is essentially about the culture, Gibson believes, and mindfulness should play an equal role in progressive and positive leadership. "A good leader himself must demonstrate being aware or mindful, to enable him to lead effectively. He or she must have the eyes to see, the ears to listen and an awareness to inspire, motivate, empathise and develop his people to become who they were born to be. Therefore, leadership and mindfulness are inextricably linked," says Gibson.



TIME TO

CASE STUDY: STRICTLY ORGANISED

Sammy Ryan, founder of Strictly Organised, a professional organising company for individuals and small businesses, first met Gail Gibson when she attended a course of hers in 2013 and has since worked with her on a number of individual projects. "I have worked with other business coaches previously which helped me learn

some of the business basics when I first started, but where Gail differs is that she uses a variety of approaches to highlight what might be holding you back from reaching your potential and how you might overcome them. I like to think of it as a 'toolbox of techniques'," Ryan says.

All of the different approaches are designed to re-examine how you might be viewing things, whether good or bad and how 'true' your view might be, Ryan explains. "So you can understand whether your reaction or lack of action might be the cause of a 'limiting belief' or when thinking through a business problem 'walking and talking' it

through away from the office might help you to look at it from a different perspective."

This sort of understanding, Ryan says, helps you to be confident in the way that you manage your team and your clients and set realistic goals and targets for yourself and your team.

"I have found working with Gail really inspiring and learned a number of leadership lessons along the way, namely to be clear in what I want to do, have a belief that I can do it and not to be afraid of trying out new things to help me think through problems. It helps to keep me focused on what needs to be done today," Ryan says.

THE SPIRITUALIST VICTOR MARINO, FOUNDER OF PEOPLE CENTRED LEARNING CONSULTANCY

"We are all faced with some tough and compelling questions today and not necessarily ones with easy answers", says Marino. "When we take a look around and evaluate the systems and approaches that underpin business, education, economics, politics and almost every other structure and then ask is this serving you, me, the rest of humanity or rapidly making matters worse, what do you think and say?"

The act of connecting to a spirit can be contained in a number of professions and practices, according to Marino. These include Olympic athletes and sportsmen and women, inventors and scientists, business leaders, meditation and religious practice and arts and performance.

Marino uses a variety of techniques, including rhythmic breathing, meditation and basic mindfulness, to help managers connect with what he calls their 'spiritual intelligence.' He is also a big advocate of a technique he calls the "three brains" - using your head, heart and gut to evaluate a specific situation and to pay attention to the language of the body as well as the mind and respond accordingly.

"Scientific evidence indicates that meditation, focusing mindfulness,



compassion, and loving kindness, change both behaviour and mood and ultimately the structure of the neural networks of the brain. In short, neurons that fire together wire together," Marino says.

Ultimately, Marino believes, it's not about expecting people to convert to a spiritual practice but simply opening up their mind to less traditional ways of reaching your potential through different and new methods.

"To paraphrase my good friend, Kevin Bryant, co-founder of Educated Change consultancy and a Tai-Chi teacher instructor: "The idea is not to gain converts to spiritual practice but to open up the minds of many who may be locked in more traditional paradigms of what is required for success in business and in life and specifically what mental, emotional, and physical states are required to create passion, fire, and vision'," Marino says.

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