

In broad brushstrokes, Western managers and leaders have traditionally tended to mimic Napoleonic attributes of strong, disciplined and headstrong warriors determined to lead their companies into the battles for international markets and emerge victorious. Particularly in the hero-worshipping United States, where companies have often been judged by the ability (or lack thereof) of their CEOs, leadership has been equated with a larger-than-life figure at the corporate helm. With his steady hand on the wheel, the theory went, the company would be navigated through rough waters. Heroes, after all, were supposed to be omnipotent.

This theory, of course, was and still is the antithesis of traditional Eastern-style management (especially the Japanese model) where individual rights are readily sacrificed for the sake of group unity and cohesiveness. Leaders in this model don't really lead, they coach. Reprimanding individuals, finger-pointing and allocating of personal responsibility are all considered taboo. The ideal boss is a paternalistic father figure, devoid of egocentric actions. His or her first and last concerns are for the health of the company—selling it, or even part of it, is totally unthinkable.

Post-Heroic Leadership

Enter the late '80s. Economic bubbles everywhere burst. The Berlin Wall collapsed. An international recession set in as Cold War systems crumbled. Companies adjusted to new realities by altering and downsizing age-old hierarchies. Former monopolies were liberalized and thousands of formerly comfortable workers went on unemployment. Welcome to the Nasty Nineties and the age of the "post-heroic" leadership, as *Fortune* magazine's recent cover story put it.

"Some time after restructuring, but before reengineering and reinvention, you accepted the dizzying truth: that the only constant in today's world is exponentially increasing change," wrote correspondent John Huey. The new corporate buzzwords are "empowerment," "flattened management structures," "virtual leadership," "servant leadership," "transformational" and "feedback." In this brave new "post-heroic" world, leaders are not born into corporate boardrooms. They are not even voted into that position—they evolve until the corporate consensus recognizes them as such. "Post-heroic leaders don't expect to solve all the problems themselves. They realize no one can deal with the emerging and colliding tyrannies of speed, quality, customer satisfaction, innovation, diversity, and technology. Virtual leaders just say no to their egos," wrote Huey.

Examples include president Bill Gore, of W.L. Gore and Associates, which manufactures space-age waterproof Gore-Tex garments that keep water out while letting one's perspiration escape. W.L. Gore practices

what it calls "un-management," meaning that this company has neither an hierarchical structure nor titles for its employees. There are no budgets, leaders evolve, and compensation is determined by committee. The values that Bill Gore set for his unique company?

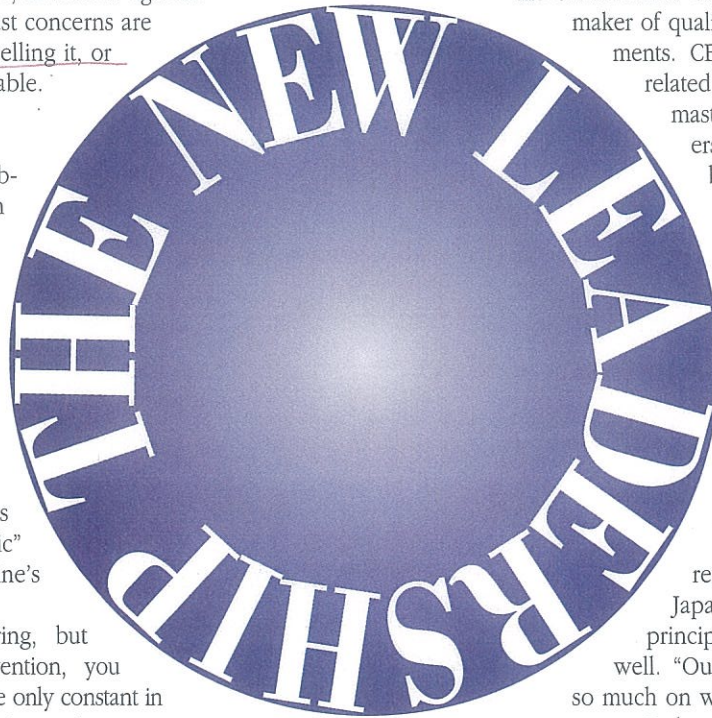
- Fairness. A dedication to maintaining it.
- Commitment. If you make one, keep it. Everyone makes his or her own.
- Freedom. The company allows individuals the freedom to grow beyond what they're doing, and they are expected to use it.
- Water line. A hole above a ship's water line won't sink it but one below it will. Certain decisions, say, building a new plant, demand consultation and agreement. Other decisions, say, launching a new product, don't. This value substitutes for values.

The LEVI Experience

Another example of post-heroic leadership in action concerns one of the United States' oldest companies, Levi Strauss & Co., maker of quality blue jeans and other denim garments. CEO Robert Haas, who is distantly related to the 19th century founder, has mastered the principles of virtual leadership. Haas believes that one of the biggest hang-ups of traditional management has been to hoard information in order to keep a tight grip on control. Massive cross-training in Levi Strauss has reduced that particular problem while helping boost production to record highs. The number of rejects has been reduced drastically and the length of policy manuals has dropped precipitously.

John Chappell, president and representative director of Levi Strauss Japan K.K., has been introducing the principles of virtual leadership in Japan as well. "Our Leadership Program focuses not so much on what leaders do but how they do it. It draws on a variety of 'new' values such as empowerment, recognition, and so on. Previously, our training programs in Japan had featured only lecture-type programs so this interactive style is a bit of a first for some of our employees. The program here is very similar to the one we run in California and we believe that learning to act in a team fashion is a much more powerful learning experience than simply sitting passively in a classroom," he explained.

At first, Chappell thought that these rather Western-style teaching methods wouldn't go down well to Japanese employees who are more attuned to working within rigid hierarchies. But he also realized that these employees are highly educated, have good skills and are more oriented toward group behavior than Westerners. "For example, one



POST-HEROIC CEOs DEBUT

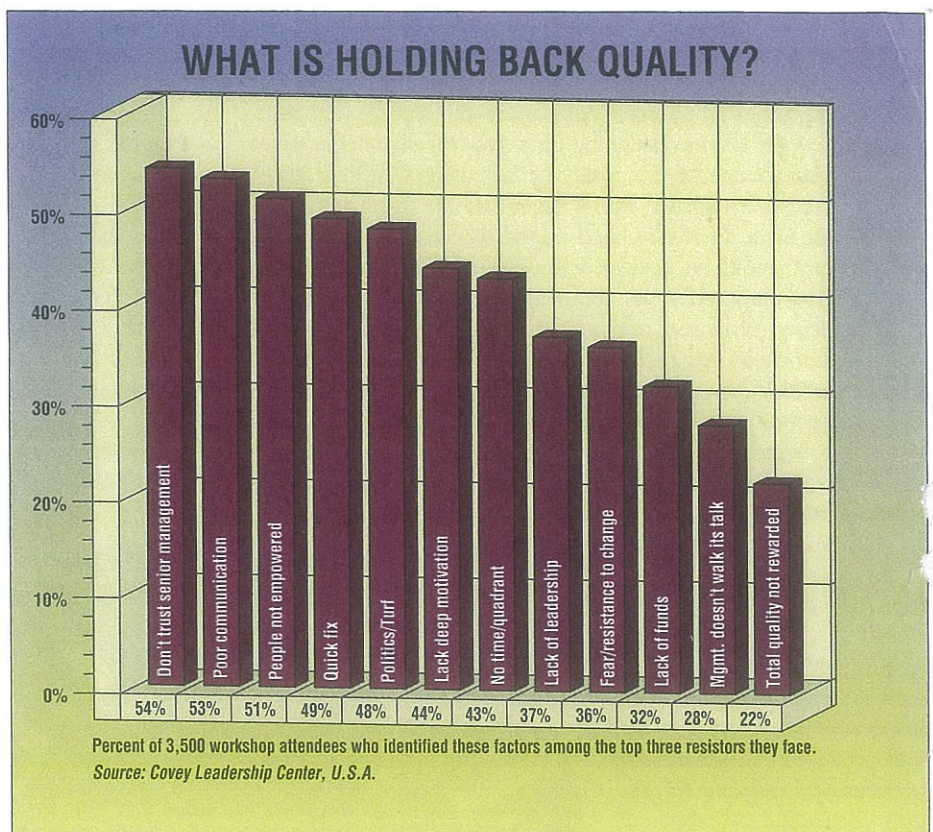
BY JOHN PARKER

exercise in our course is to perform a job as a group but all participants are blindfolded. In three different countries, I'd never seen the task solved but our Japanese employees did it in about 30 seconds!" Chappell exclaimed.

Chappell and other CEOs believe that there are different and varied forces at work here: globalization and the speed of communications, for instance, have changed the way business is done these days, and management is reflecting these factors. "Before, one would write a letter and wait several days to get an answer. These days, by the time you read to the bottom of your e-mail messages, the first one has already been answered—the communications delay has been removed. A single manager can only handle so many decisions—one can no longer walk on to the factory floor to see how things are going since that facility can be 3,000 miles away," he said.

Cultural Cross-Fertilization

Because very different cultures, such as those of the individualistic United States and group-oriented Japan have now spent decades studying each others' characteristics, cross-fertilization of corporate ideas is gathering steam in each culture, believes Keiko Suzuki, training manager at J.P. Morgan. "Americans are discovering that empowerment shortens the time needed for implementation and that the traditional top-down decision-making model is no longer adequate, in many cases, for complex international transactions," Suzuki explained. "Japanese, on the other hand, are finding out that the changes ongoing in their domestic economy necessitate more individualistic management styles. A certain amount of



cultural cross-fertilization is going on in terms of managerial training. Companies worldwide are having to flatten out their hierarchical structures. In purely domestic operations, the traditional hierarchical structure is just fine but the more global the company is in orientation, the more it needs to adapt the new leadership concepts in its decision-making process."

One American trainer with long-term experience training both Americans and Japanese agrees, with reservations. Linda Laddin, vice president, regional training for

Union Bank of Switzerland said: "Japanese certainly have a learning attitude—whether they are 20 or 50 they approach a learning opportunity opportunistically, and I mean that in a very positive sense. From my experience, it is much easier and pleasant to train curious and interested Japanese than it is a room full of American managers. I think we'll need a great deal more evolution before Western managers are willing to set aside their egos, give up a few privileges and relinquish some of their control to a broader group effort."

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Let's Get Physical!

As we all know, bookshelves are groaning under the weight of self-help tomes of all varieties. Whether one can actually teach others how to be a leader or whether leaders are simply born is a philosophical question never properly answered. Others say forget the classroom antics, the place to learn about the pleasures and effectiveness of group activities is in the great outdoors.

Anthony Willoughby, representative of I Will Not Complain International, is one trainer who believes that such outdoor motivational programs build new channels of communication as well as strengthen the feeling of working in a team. "Most companies take our outdoor motivation team building and personal development programs to build channels of communication," Willoughby said. "These people come from a variety of backgrounds and countries so they create different patterns of communication when they come together. This is especially important now that many companies are reorganizing."

Willoughby is also not shy about pointing out that all this focus on post-heroic management styles is quite new. "Five years ago, we couldn't get companies to undertake this kind of training but now we've never been busier—4,500 people have taken our three-day program in the past five years. The self-selection of leaders is a very important concept these days because the people that voluntarily decide to go off and climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, for example, are going to be the same people who win in the future. They take that same spirit of challenge back home with them—but it is only the companies with enlightened leadership who comprehend this."

Many Japanese managers also believe that management training is responding to new stimuli from international business. Mamoru Ohara, regional manager, public relations for Japan Upjohn Limited, a market leader in the pharmaceutical industry, agrees. "Management training has changed in the past couple of years in our company in response to movements in the international environment, particularly in relationship to President Bill Clinton's proposals for health care reform in the United States. Competition will tighten in the pharmaceuticals industry so we need to emphasize more research and development than we used to, in addition to marketing. There has been a slight shift in the focus of our management training courses, but the



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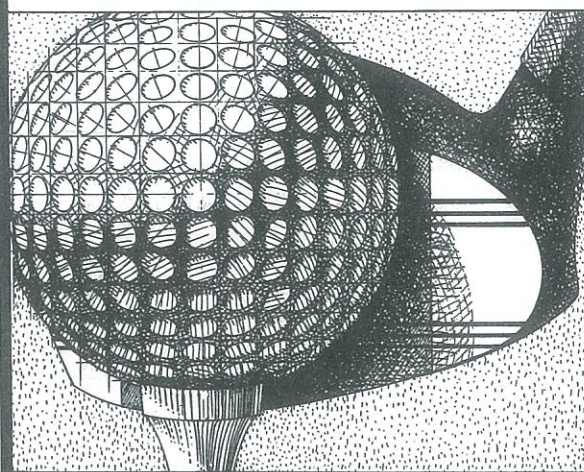
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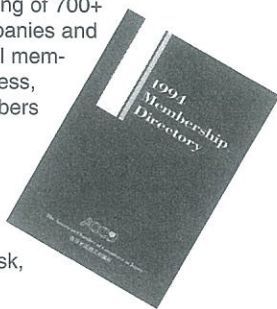
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STEPHEN COVEY'S SEVEN HABITS

- 1. BE PROACTIVE.** You are responsible for your life. Decide what you should do and get on with it.
- 2. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND.** Think of how you want to be remembered at your funeral. Use this as a basis for your everyday behavior.
- 3. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST.** Devote more time to what's important but not necessarily urgent.
- 4. THINK WIN-WIN.** Have an abundance mentality. Seek solutions that benefit all parties.
- 5. SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD.** Don't dive into a conversation. Listen until you truly understand the other person.
- 6. SYNERGIZE.** Find ways to cooperate with everyone. Value the differences between people.
- 7. SHARPEN THE SAW.** Continually exercise and renew the four elements of your self: physical, mental, emotional/social, and spiritual.

essentials remain the same. We are now a much more bottom-line, results-oriented company than, say, ten years ago," he explained.

One Step Further

Managers have generally learned to master the statistical and mechanical tools they need to make them and their companies more competitive, believes Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon & Schuster, 1989), and other books and training materials. Covey, who takes the concept of post-heroic leadership training one step further, says that managers now need to reshape the way they think about operations. He makes a distinction between leadership and management—the former is about the top line and the latter concerns the bottom line. "Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is against the right wall. Efficient management without the effective leadership is like straightening deck chairs on the Titanic." Covey once said.

Perhaps the hottest property around these days in the growing field of teaching the new leadership, Covey will be coming to Japan in April for a series of lectures and seminars, including one for the ACCJ. Covey's seminars, described by several ACCJ members who have attended them as "inspirational," deal more with self discovery than with the teaching of new managerial techniques. These seminars are focused on "principle-centered leadership,"

another of Covey's favorite themes, which espouse his now-famous seven habits, one of which builds on the other. Even President Bill Clinton has offered his personal praise, stating that "If every American worker read Dr. Covey's book, productivity would increase dramatically."

The gap between theory and practice remains a problem, however. Trainers like Anthony Willoughby wonder how many companies actually believe in the new leadership and how many are only paying lip service because it's in vogue at the moment. Others, like Linda Laddin, point to the problem inherent in the sometimes contradictory relationship between principles and values. "The Western concept of a leader is still based on very old values, not principles. These values have now changed. Real changes will follow behind slowly because leaders have a great deal of difficulty accepting the new values," concluded Laddin.

Learning to lead, if you are not a born leader, is one thing but knowing how and being willing to follow is quite another. Maybe Thomas J. Nevins, president of *Technics in Management Transfer, Inc.*, put it most succinctly. "The most important thing about being a manager is not what happens when you are there, but what happens when you are not there."

John Parker is a free-lance writer who contributes articles on business and education to various international publications.