

SkylineG Blog – Leadership Blog Posts Greatest Hits Volume 1

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1. The Punk Rock Leader: Why More Leaders Need to Unleash Their Inner Punk Rocker

Punk Rock - the music that fueled my skateboard charged youth still rings true in my ears today. Punk rock changed my life and how I see and interact with the world. In the context of work – punk has influenced me in a range of areas including how embraced my first real corporate job, set about trying to change the world of work, and the books I write – my second book even opens with a quote from Suicidal Tendencies first album.

To me “Punk” represents a number of traits but the touchstones that have fueled me include being true to yourself, being driven to overcome obstacles, thumbing your nose and convention and status quo, not taking the world (opinions) too seriously, and taking risks. Reflecting on the world of work and specifically leadership, there are a number of punk rock traits that I think a number of leaders could use.

What is the Punk Rock Leader and what are the characteristics:

A punk rock leader is somebody that is unconventional, creative, blazes a trail. The punk rock leader may or may not have tattoos, piercings, and a propensity for stage diving. The Punk Rock Leader is bent on doing things their way and will at times push the boundaries of the HR comfort zone. “Punk Rock” as I use the term here is more mindset than a dress code.

The Punk Rock Leader:

- **Has a Vision!** Though it might be messy sometimes, the Punk Rock Leader has a bigger picture in mind and communicates that vision
- **Communicates Directly!** You don't have to be a psychic to know what the Punk Rock Leader is thinking. They are clear, concise and you know exactly where you stand.
- **No F#@*%N Politics!** The Punk Rock Leader does not play games. You know exactly what she is thinking and what she wants.
- **Creative!** The Punk Rock Leader looks at the world in a different way. He sees convention and makes a U-turn for how to do something differently.
- **Part Bulldog and Part Bulldozer!** The Punk Rock Leader is stubborn, tenacious and willing to drive through barriers.
- **Fearless!** The Punk Rock Leader embraces conflict and risk as something positive. She is not scared of what people think or the possibility of failure. Being a scared to try is scarier than not trying at all.
- **Bring IT on!** The Punk Rock leader loves a good business challenge (and to prove others wrong).
- **Messy is Good!** The Punk Rock Leader is not above rolling up his sleeves and getting their hands dirty.
- **Likes it Loud!** The Punk Rock Leader is not afraid of getting ideas out on the table, kicking up dust, confronting the good bad and the ugly.
- **Speed it Up!** The Punk rock leader likes it fast; get it done, get it out, get it tested, and make it better!

2. Are You a Restless Leader?

I have been thinking lately about recent Aberdeen Group research that year over year indicates consistent CEO concerns with significant business issues such as innovation, employee productivity, execution, etc. Consistent issues, no surprises, yet year over year the concerns remain the same. Why? Certainly, leaders have the authority to make things happen. Making significant changes doesn't always cost a fortune- so budget shouldn't be an issue. These issues are fundamental to company success, share price, and competitive advantage - so prioritization also should not be an issue. What is going on here?

Maybe the answer is simple. Leaders like any other workforce demographic are composed of high, mid, and low performers. Maybe for the low and mid-performing leaders the status quo is acceptable and moving the needle means nothing more than taking a survey to understand their companies' current strengths and inefficiencies. In my experience, high-performing leaders are restless. High-performing leaders are not content with the status quo even if the status quo is great.

Are you a restless leader? Are you a leader that constantly wrestles with the status quo and is driven to do things better now not later? A restless leader constantly scans the horizon for innovation and opportunities to ensure their company has a strategic competitive advantage.

Traits of the Restless Leader:

- *Informed:* The Restless Leader stays informed. She draws from a range of sources of information spanning industry, continent, and subject. The Restless Leader also draws from sources that inspire; such as art and literature as the Restless Leader knows that there are lessons and inspiration to be gained from metaphors that surround them.
- *Curious:* The Restless Leader asks questions and seeks a better understanding from all levels within the company. The Restless Leader seeks to better understand and expand their knowledge of topics in which they are already knowledgeable as well as those that are new to them without ego or prejudice.
- *Takes Informed Risks:* The Restless Leader seeks out new ideas, technologies, methods for making the workplace more productive, collaborative, and progressive. They gather data from multiple points inside and outside their company. The Restless Leader is a strategic early adopter.
- *Proactive:* The Restless Leader does not wait to take action. Theories are to be tested, measured, and if proven worthy, deployed. Data is acted upon when gathered.
- *Steady:* The Restless Leader has a vision, strategy, and goals aligned to that vision. The speed to change, adopt, innovate, and improve is consistently aligned to the foundation of this vision, strategy, and goals.

Whether you are a Restless Leader or aspire to being one, thinking and acting in the manner of a Restless Leader will focus your actions and help drive personal and company performance.

3. Telepathic Leaders Equal Big Failures. Leaders Don't Rely on Psychic Skills Instead of Communication Skills

Around the world, there are leaders who are intentionally or unknowingly relying upon their psychic abilities and those of their employees to relay important information with disastrous results. The results of failed telepathy range from massive product recalls, failed change initiatives to unengaged employees. Humor aside, the lack of information and assumptions made by leaders regarding things as broad as their vision to as specific as individual performance expectations leads to big problems that are easily avoided.

One of the most important behaviors that a leader can exhibit is explicit verbal communication. Sadly, a majority of leaders make assumptions that employees know what they are thinking. What causes this to happen? Effective communication is a fundamental skill that every good leader has...right? More than likely the issue is less about the ability to effectively communicate but about assumptions and other underlying causes.

I spent some time in the Skyline Group Leadership Laboratory to uncover what I think are some of the significant underlying issues that prevent leaders from effective explicit communication:

Too much internal processing.

You, the leader are marinating 24/7 in the problems and potential solutions facing the team, organization, and company. The culprit that leads to poor communication is that you have spent too much time internally considering these topics to a point where it is assumed that others are on the same page.

Solution: First don't assume that others know what you are thinking. Second, get ideas out of your head sooner than later and on the table to share with others.

You assume that others will communicate for you.

How many times have you attended meetings where you shared information with direct reports with the intent that they share with others outside of the meeting only to learn weeks down the line that the information never made it out of the meeting room? It is one thing to communicate something and it is another thing to make sure that your information is effectively being passed down to those who need it. Communication "black holes" are easily created when you "the leader" communicate to your direct reports without explicitly directing your reports to communicate with their teams and confirming in follow-up meetings that the communication has taken place.

Solution: To avoid communication black holes make explicit requests that information is shared and follow up with the individual(s) tasked with sharing that she has done so. If necessary, reinforce and align communications from your direct reports with your own communication.

You believe that others are on the same page and will ask questions to confirm your thinking.

You're a leader and your team is composed of leaders. Of course, everyone knows how to do his or her job. However, despite being leaders, the team is still composed of human beings and human beings like nature, abhor a vacuum. When there is a gap in information the human will fill the information vacuum with his or her own ideas, assumptions, and expectations. As a leader, you know that bad things can happen when people tasked with important responsibilities assume the wrong things. Additionally, people often will not ask clarifying questions either because they think they know what to do or because they do not want to lose face.

Solution: Be explicit with the people you are leading. Create room and an environment for asking questions by leading by example and asking questions. Provide positive reinforcement when people ask questions or request further detail.

Underestimating the desire of people to be led.

As a leader, your team and employees are eagerly looking to you for definitive guidance and direction. People want to be a part of something larger than themselves and your role as the leader is to set that vision and provide guidance on how to make that

happen. Making believers and empowering your team requires consistent and explicit communication of what you envision and what it will take to make the vision a reality.

Solution: Be the leader you admire. As a leader, you have the privilege of leading others. Share your vision and the specifics of how others play a role in making that vision a reality.

Laziness.

An underlying and frustratingly simple cause of communication lapses is laziness. Whether it is failure to prioritize all hands meetings with employees or not bothering to fill in and share details with the executive team, laziness is often the failed communication culprit.

Solution: Create a communication strategy that includes company/organization, team, and individual communication timing and schedule. One great technique employed by more than one leader to connect with her employees is a daily email that includes a range of topics from company news, to recognizing an employee, to a fun video. Plan the time, make the effort, and see results.

Avoiding these communication pitfalls and following these simple steps can avoid relying upon the psychic abilities of your employees and increase company performance.

4. This Is Why You Need Balance To Be An Effective Leader

The conversation on gender and leadership centers on the same advice. Women in leadership need to be less bossy and more confident, and men need to be more understanding. It's been said over and over again, and yet, the balance between men and women in leadership isn't getting any better.

While women make up 53 percent of entry-level employees, a 2015 [analysis](#) published in the Journal of Applied Psychology found they account for just 24 percent of senior vice presidents and 19 percent of c-suite executives.

But research conducted by our company, [Skyline Group International, Inc.](#), tells a different story. Leadership isn't about male or female — it's about balance. Here's a closer look at what we found and what it means for leaders:

Leadership is on spectrum.

When we think about leadership and gender, we associate certain traits with men and women. Women in leadership positions are great listeners, they're compassionate, and they're collaborative. On the other hand, men in leadership roles are competitive, assertive, and decisive.

In reality, one gender doesn't own certain leadership skills — there's a masculine and feminine way of performing each skill. According to [our research](#), both men and women

agreed that there is a significant and recognizable gender continuum on 27 of the 28 competencies included in the study.

In other words, both men and women possess the skills for leadership, they just manifest in different ways. For example, both men and women have listening skills, but they listen differently. Women tend to listen to understand what the speaker is feeling, while men listen to understand what the speaker is saying.

And while men and women lead in different ways, one approach isn't necessarily better than the other. In our survey, participants rated more than 70 percent of leadership competencies, both masculine and feminine expressions, as equally effective.

Effectiveness depends on context and audience.

But just because masculine and feminine expressions are seen as equally effective, doesn't mean that leaders can always act in a way that feels natural. Being an effective leader all comes down to context.

The perception of leadership effectiveness depends on who you are working with and the needs of the situation. All leaders need balance. You need to adapt your behaviors based on your audience, your approach and your gender, simultaneously. You need to develop and use both the masculine and feminine expressions of a competency, depending on what is needed, instead of relying on one default set of behaviors.

Balance isn't as easy as it sounds. While men have been coached to adopt the qualities of women in leadership positions, the same hasn't been done for women. Why not? Well, it's a little tricky.

Women are tougher on women.

One of the major reasons balance is particularly difficult for women is because they tend to be judged harshly when they adopt masculine behaviors, especially by other women.

Our research found a significantly lower perception of effectiveness when women express the masculine behavior in 57 percent of the 28 leadership competencies studied. In comparison, men were perceived significantly poorer when utilizing the feminine approach in just 39 percent of competencies.

What's more, for 43 percent of the competencies where women express the masculine version of the trait, only women rated other women as less effective.

So, when should women avoid masculine expressions of leadership traits? In general, women were viewed negatively when they take an assertive and directive approach to leadership. When women in leadership adhere strictly to the rules, they are perceived poorly by other women.

In fact, the more detailed, directive, and structured women are, the more negatively other women view them. In these situations, women should embrace the feminine side of these skills. That means listening and collaborating with employees to include them in decisions and find new ways of doing things.

All leaders need balance.

Gender aside, all leaders need to find a balance between masculine and feminine leadership competencies. Pay attention to your team and what they need. One day they may need a steady guiding hand, and the next they may need a listening ear and shoulder to cry on. Work on developing both masculine and feminine skills so you can meet their needs, no matter the situation.

5. Leaders: This is The Most Important Thing You Can Do Today at Work (and it's about Productivity)

Your team should focus on productivity, but as a leader, your focus should be on bringing the right perspective to your role.

Every day we are faced with the need to get things done, produce, move projects forward, and advance the business. A common source of blame for not getting things done, all that can, or needs to be done in our day is *time* and specifically not enough of it. Prioritizing the important stuff is not so tough. In fact, is very straight forward when you are clear on what are the most important actions that need to be taken.

The steps required towards greater productivity is pretty much common knowledge that is often hijacked by funny cat photos, poor time management, and a lack of discipline.

But this is not about your productivity or lack of it. Not productive enough? – Google “David Allen”, get control over your Facebooking, and stop it with the cranky cat pics.

As a leader, the most important thing that you can do in a single day to make a difference to your career, business success, and your personal happiness is not about the task, getting it done, or checking the box. The most important action that you can take any given day is bringing the right mental perspective to what you do.

What is the right mental perspective?

Though each situation warrants varying behaviors and responses, there are three pillars that comprise the right mental perspective: Curiosity, Confidence, and Caring (the three C's).

1. **Curiosity:** No cat killing here. Curiosity is where the most important ideas and inventions start. It all begins here. Let me put it this way: status quo = slow decay and death. Curiosity = life. Curiosity means you seek to uncover the underlying issues, concerns, opportunities, and problems. You explore multiple paths to a solution. You seek to uncover the concerns and motivations of others and to explore alternative solutions. Curiosity also means that you look inward: you possess the drive to deepen your level of understanding about yourself and continue to learn and grow.
2. **Caring:** Gosh, the word “caring” sounds so soft and cuddly. In reality, really caring about something takes lots of hormones and isn't child's play. Because if

you really, no BS, really care about something, then you actually do something about it. To care enough about the individual, team, customer, and company to make the effort that is needed. Caring also means focusing on yourself such as creating work life balance and fulfilling your needs as a person not only an employee.

3. **Confidence:** Do you have what it takes to care? To be Curious? You will need to put on your big boy / big girl pants in order to step up. Got 'em on? Confidence means that you take a risk, speak up when no one else is doing so, state the truth, apologize when you make a mistake, stand up for others, give credit to others when credit is due, and make the difficult decisions. Confidence requires being true to yourself as a leader and manifesting your values.

What are the steps that can be taken to bring this to action?

Curiosity. Bringing a mental perspective of curiosity begins by asking questions. The line of questioning should range from exploring what actions you can take in your current environment to do things differently to posing questions to the team that may expand thinking. What if...? What can we do differently? Imagine if...?

Caring. Deep meaningful caring begins with identifying what you care about in the context of the people, projects, objectives that surround you. Finding the meaningful place to invest your caring calories takes discretion. For example, you may not care at all about refining the accounting team's methods for depreciation but you care deeply about the impact and results that you bring to each project you touch.

Confidence. Confidence begins by believing in yourself, who you are, and having a pretty good sense of what is important to you. Before testing the waters, think about what is important to you and your values. Next step is believing in yourself and bringing that belief to what you do. Bring this attitude to action takes place by manifesting your curiosity and caring.

What is the impact of deploying this mental perspective?

Bringing to bear the three C's to what you do will transform how you interact with the people, teams, broader company, and how you show up as a leader. Through a mental perspective grounded in curiosity, confidence, and caring you become inherently more engaged in your work, proactively unearthing and addressing concerns of your customers, coworkers, and company, and maximizing the personal return on the efforts you are making because you are equally caring and aware about your needs. Isn't this what being a leader should be about?

6. Achieving Your Objectives: Starting Slow In Order to Go Fast

In today's turbo-charged, nitro-powered, gotta-go world, we are pushed to perform faster and, in many environments, we are rewarded for speed. However, it's very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the right objectives on time if you are not clear on what success really looks like, on the resources required, and have a plan. Taking the

time to prepare and identify a strategy to achieve success will prevent truly detrimental derailers and, in turn, help you beat your deadlines.

Ready, Set, Pause

Sometimes the most valuable action you can take is waiting an extra day to gather what you need, ask questions, gather additional materials, fill in the critical spots where you need more data. Be sure to find out about procedures, policies, politics, or strategies before you create your plan. As the planner, you are taking all available working knowledge and funneling it into a series of steps and procedures to create a positive outcome. Know what you're planning, obstacles to avoid, and the most effective route to achieving your goals.

When planning and organizing, it is vital to gather all the available knowledge you can about your initiative. This knowledge comes in a variety of forms: videos, literature, reports, and other published outside knowledge; discussions with colleagues or people we know who have taken on similar projects; evaluation of the organization's prior experience in dealing with a similar initiative; input from stakeholders for this particular endeavor; unearthing and addressing any sensitivities the project has; and last but not least, our own accumulated experience and ability to plan.

Temper Your Emotions

Sometimes we come up with great ideas that look like winning solutions. Temptation, enthusiasm, and passion can get the better of us, and we rush into action with more eagerness than a gold miner who has struck gold. Being powered by our emotions and energy can be fantastic, as this energy can launch you to quickly achieve milestones and blow through any early obstacles. Invariably, though, emotion can only take you and your team so far and you may start slowing down, and then an obstacle or situation comes along that stops you dead in your tracks: Money runs out. We lose a key resource or a supplier misses a deadline. Stuck, we might not know how to take the next step, or know even what the next step is. Balance emotions with preparation, contingency planning, and keeping your eye on the goal in order to go the distance.

Success Is a Marathon

Like marathoners who start too fast, people who run at breakneck speeds, rushing their ideas, risk running into a wall that is truly debilitating. The new initiative sprint often looks like this: amazing idea, coupled with passion, enthusiastic leadership support, and an adrenalin shot of get-it-done-now launches a poorly planned initiative into the cinder block wall called reality.

To avoid hitting this wall, begin by mapping out an initiative for the department or organization, spend a couple of extra days—or weeks, if you have it—to organize the business knowledge that will inform and strengthen the planning process.

Consider these questions prior to launching your next initiative:

What research needs to be done?

- Who can you call for input and feedback on your plan?

- How did the organization achieve related initiatives in the past?
- What are vital resources and are they available?
- What are the most significant obstacles to success and how do you address them?
- Beyond emotion, what are the data to support the initiative?

All of these are simple questions that bolster your plans and help eliminate the painful moment when your great idea hits the wall and you have to start over.

About Skyline Group

Skyline Group is the leading provider of scalable leadership solutions with a foundation built upon decades of executive coaching with some of the most recognized companies in the world. We are revolutionizing the leadership development industry with our C4X coaching platform. C4X is the only coaching solution that gives you the ability to develop all of your leaders consistently and systematically from onboarding to executive development. C4X combines a flexible technology platform (integrated assessment, content, metrics, and coach management system) with the personalized impact and connection of 1:1 coaching. Learn more at www.SkylineGroup.com and www.C4X.com.



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