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## **ENCOURAGE LEADERSHIP OR STAGNATE**

With the General Election around the corner it is a good time to reflect on the importance of leadership as the engine of change.

Without leadership, few positive things happen in our world. Fortunately, the nation is waking up to the realization that it needs to nurture as much of this precious behaviour as it can find. We all know this from our experience in family, work, and in other settings.

As a society New Zealand is now more confident and resilient than it used to be. Fortunately our business, education and political leaders are making things happen in a variety of ways, and engendering confidence in the nation. A serious commitment to leadership development is now slowly emerging as part of this phenomenon.

Sustained, innovative leadership is as essential to our well-being and resilience as a nation, as blood flowing through our bodily systems.

The national Knowledge Wave Conferences of a few years back have generated supportive international networks of expat Kiwis and have led to the recent establishment of the Leadership Institute at the University of Auckland. There are also other promising public initiatives, indicating we are taking the issue seriously.

Most people do not see themselves as leaders, even in small settings, when many of them in fact are. When individuals are committed to making their workplace or family a better place for those who work or live there, they are taking on a leadership role, perhaps without realizing it.

Leadership communicates to those around us what is possible; it says, 'we can do better than this'; it inspires and motivates people so they come to see that tomorrow can become better than today.

Our national psyche, which often provokes us to look sideways at those who stand out from the group or crowd unless they are sporting 'greats', is fortunately being challenged by the need to create more wealth, to be more innovative, and to be able to offer the people of the world goods and services they really want, not what we think they want. Leadership is an important ingredient of this development.

There is a growing interest in leadership as a human phenomenon and it is beginning to be seen not as a means of ordering people around, but as a way of enabling them to have a more fulfilling life as contributors to their work place and other settings. Everyone has the potential to develop leadership skills, rather than being serfs who do what they are told and contribute little to the nation.

This is where values education, and concepts like emotional quotient and spiritual intelligence, come into their own. Effective leaders are individuals who know who they are, who are able to emotionally connect with others and who are able to unleash energy and commitment in those they work with. Further, they want to serve the people they lead. This is simple behaviour emanating from a confident, mature, individual.

Parents, principals and teachers, employers, all have a responsibility to talk up with young people that leadership is a skill that can be developed and not something you leave to others.

Not everyone is a leader by the time they leave school. However, if everyone was immersed in a culture which says: "The nation needs you and your leadership contribution", an expectation of a leadership contribution from everyone would quickly emerge and high-powered energy would be created.

Overwhelmingly, progress only comes to nations and groups of people through incremental change. If the country succeeds in graduating large numbers of young people from its schools and tertiary education institutions who see it as part of their life's work to improve everything they touch, we would have an extraordinary surge in innovation, social development, wealth and cohesive social interaction. People generally respond positively when they are inspired and treated properly. They then become motivated to change and exercise their own form of leadership.

Because we are a small and isolated nation, we have to continuously stretch ourselves. Encouraging leadership contributions at all levels of society is a way to ensure that this happens. Then we all will win and the country will become a much more confident and significant international player and a better place for those who call New Zealand home.

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