

Drumming and Leadership

Last month, as part of a leadership development programme for senior managers in the NHS, we invited [Rhythmicity](#), a company which specialises in drumming events, to run a drumming circle for the participants.

Our evening events in the programme had always been different and we never let the participants know what they were going to do in advance. There was, therefore, a slight air of trepidation, as well as a great deal of expectation, as we assembled in the bar ready to retrace our steps to the conference room. As we approached the conference room the sound of drums could be distinctly heard, generating a few anxious looks! We entered the conference room and Tim, our facilitator for the evening, was playing a simple beat on an African drum. He welcomed us, invited us to choose an instrument from those laid out in a circle and join in. Within a minute of entering the room the group was making music! As we settled down Tim speeded up and slowed down the tempo and we followed suit. He then counted to three and with a wave of his hand brought silence. We then experimented with a variety of rhythms before Tim gave us the challenge of working in three teams and putting a nursery rhyme to music. Performing in front of your peers after only five minutes practice was a stretch and yet we were able to recognise all of the nursery rhymes!

As the evening wore on we created more and more complicated rhythms that required us to become aware of others in the group rather than simply focussing on our part. Tim had also brought a wide range of different percussion instruments and we had the chance to experiment with other instruments and sounds. Finally Tim got each participant to beat out a rhythm for the rest to follow. We all experienced the joy of hearing our rhythm played by the rest of the group - although to get up and do it took some courage!

After two hours our hands were ready for a rest. However, there was general sense of achievement and satisfaction in having done something that most people later admitted would have filled them with dread if we had told them in advance!

But what has an evening drumming got to do with leadership??

As we reflected over dinner we realised that the event provided some great parallels and reminders:

How often do we 'choreograph' our introduction to make maximum impact? Great leaders are aware of the impact they make at all times.

At times we all lead and yet how aware are we of the power that we have as leaders to dictate the speed the group works at?

The leader not only determines the speed but also dictates the beat; what the leader focuses on is what gets done. What are we focussing our attention on?

The leader at times needs to use the power of leadership to stop the group if necessary. How often are we strong enough to say "stop"?

As leaders at times we have to push people out of their comfort zones. Great leaders, like Tim, read the group, show confidence in them to achieve, provide a safe environment and know how far to push while displaying no ego of their own. Are we challenging enough?

Great leaders are brave and take on challenges. Sometimes we can achieve more than we believe - especially if we take action and be in the moment rather than pondering on what has happened in the past or on reasons why something can't be done. How often do we, as Susan Jeffers says in her popular book, 'Feel the fear and do it anyway'?

Great leaders are aware of others, really listen and tune in to the beat that's going on in their environment rather than just focus on their own rhythm. How aware are we of what is **really** going on?

Great leaders are aware that, although it is often them conducting, it is the team that creates the music. How often do we acknowledge the contributions of others?

Great leaders give people the chance to grow by allowing experimentation and choosing the instrument that is best for them. How often do we encourage experimentation?

Great leaders also realise that leading doesn't always have to be done by the same person. At times the beat can be drummed out by someone else. How often as leaders do we attempt to do everything ourselves rather than delegate?

Food for thought?

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