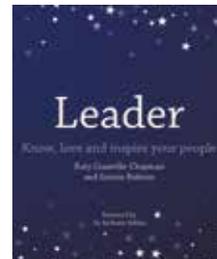


What's love got to do with leadership? Nicola Banning talks to Emmie Bidston and Katy Granville-Chapman about the ideas explored in their new book, *Leader: Know, love and inspire your people*



Emmie Bidston and Dr Katy Granville-Chapman are co-authors of *Leader: Know, love and inspire your people*, which was longlisted for CMI Management Book of the Year 2021. Katy and Emmie are Associate Fellows at the Oxford Character Project (an interdisciplinary organisation at the University of Oxford) and are Co-Chairs of the Leadership for Flourishing Group, a collaboration between the Oxford Character Project and the Human Flourishing Programme at Harvard University.



NB: *Leader: Know, love and inspire your people* was published last year, in the midst of the pandemic, at a time of great fear and uncertainty. What have the last 12 months exposed about what effective leadership looks like?

EB/KG: Globally, the pandemic has challenged leaders to step up like never before. Senior leaders in government, healthcare and business have been in the spotlight, but it's been fascinating how people everywhere have accepted the challenge of leadership. We will be reflecting on what we've learnt for a long time to come, but what seems most pertinent to us is this:

Firstly, leadership is not primarily about position, it is about who you are as a person and what you choose to do. There have been various interviews with CEOs who have been surprised by the fact that they have suddenly noticed 'leaders' everywhere in their organisations, people who have felt empowered and gone the extra mile to be extraordinary, whether that be by cleaning the hospital wards, serving in shops, meeting customers' needs or just caring for others.

Secondly, the world is too complex for leaders to know everything and lead from above. They have to empower others. Life is too fast moving for top-down leadership to work efficiently, and the teams who have done best in the pandemic are those whose leaders have inspired, equipped, resourced and empowered their people to make wise decisions on the spot and adapt to the needs on the coal face.

Thirdly, we are all human, and the best leaders have recognised that

humanity in others and the infinite worth in the people they lead. Lockdown has meant more people working from home and more interruptions from children (and cats!). That, combined with the suffering many have experienced, has allowed more room for empathy. The best leaders have treated others with dignity.

NB: Books on leadership don't often use the word 'love' in the title. How concerned were you about using the word 'love' in the context of leadership?

EB/KG: We really debated this. Love can seem fluffy and soft, or even inappropriate, in a work context. However, we were inspired by the work of Professor Matt Lee at the Harvard Human Flourishing Programme, who is on a mission to reclaim the appropriate use of the word 'love'.

The love we talk about in the book isn't weak or sentimental. It is the strength of selfless giving that brings with it a host of other virtues, such as generosity, compassion, kindness, service and courage. There is a growing body of research about the vital importance of these virtues in leadership. Katy competed for Great Britain in synchronised swimming and also worked in the army – both are high performance cultures and not situations where you would think love would be important. However, it was her experience of leaders who showed sacrificial love, who had her back and served others, that first inspired her to research and work in leadership.

We believe that a key hallmark of a great leader is the ability to deeply

relate to others as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end. This is the kind of leadership which we have found transformative in our own lives.

NB: How much did your own experiences of work and leadership inform your book?

EB/KG: We have both worked for a lot of different leaders, across a range of contexts (education, sport, the army, voluntary projects and civil service). We discussed these experiences and hunted for patterns. Maybe unsurprisingly, we came to a similar conclusion as Google did when they conducted Project Aristotle and tried to answer the question, 'Why do some teams outperform others?'. They threw lots of resources at the question. They employed a team of researchers, psychologists and statisticians, who started with a literature review, covering academic journals and books from the last 50 years. They then interviewed and observed hundreds of staff and teams at Google. They were hunting for patterns, for a formula that would help them decode the data, for clues as to how the best teams work, but the data just seemed to be pointing in different, contradictory, directions the whole time.

What gradually emerged was the fact that the most significant predictor of team performance was how the members related to one another. For example, how well they took into account each other's opinions and emotions. Team culture was far more significant than the abilities of the individuals in the team. Similarly, as Katy and I reflected on our

experiences of leadership, we realised that there wasn't a single pattern in terms of exactly what the leader did, or what kind of personality they had, but there was a deeper predicator of how well they led, which was about the quality of relationships they involved, based on how well they knew, loved and inspired their teams.

NB: Why did the two of you decide to co-write the book?

England's summer of 2018 will live long in our memory, breaking free from the routine of other years. Weeks of hot, balmy days were boosted by a national fervour as the country's football team progressed further and further into the World Cup draw. Against all the odds (and with a statement waistcoat), Gareth Southgate led the team to their first World Cup semi-final since 1990. Accolades poured in for Southgate's leadership style. He was awarded the BBC Sports Personality Coach of the Year 2018, and throngs of fans rushed to M&S to buy the famous waistcoat. In a few short weeks, he'd become an icon.

We were on the way back from a leadership conference and were discussing how wonderful it was to have such a high-profile public figure leading with empathy and compassion. We were really touched by that iconic moment after England had just won its first penalty shootout in a World Cup (ever) and, having celebrated with his own players, Gareth went to seek out Mateus Uribe, the Colombian player whose miss had set up the victory, and gave him a hug. We just knew we wanted to write a book that would take all the wider work Katy and I had been doing with leadership and all the academic research Katy was engaged in and combine it with real-life stories to inspire and equip people to lead with compassion. We knew that we wanted to make all the research and exercises available to as wide an audience as possible, so we decided to give all the royalties to the Prince's Trust.

NB: Given that the traditional model of leadership is still very much alive and kicking, what do you say to cynics of the Know, Love and Inspire model of leadership?

EB/KG: Cynics might want to consider the work of researchers

Leanne ten Brinke, Aimee Kish and Dacher Keltner, who decided to look at the impact of different personality traits on the performance of hedge fund managers in the United States between 2005 and 2015. These managers were dealing with significant sums of money – their firms each managed between US\$40 million and US\$1 trillion in assets. Success was entirely measured in terms of how much money these hedge fund managers could make.

If ever there was a scenario where financial gain was the priority, whatever the cost in terms of kindness, this was it. However, the results showed the opposite. The more Machiavellian, self-focused and lacking in empathy the managers were, the worse their financial returns. Managers who were significantly less empathic than the average earned 30% less over the course of a decade.

The latest research from the Harvard Human Flourishing Programme also confirms that showing compassion to others has a significant positive impact on our own flourishing (surprisingly much more than being shown compassion by others). It really is critical to look after your own flourishing, and we have found the idea of creating 'cycles of renewal', rather than 'cycles of sacrifice', helpful on this (see *Resonant Leadership*, by Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee).

NB: Did you have a sense of who you were writing the book for and how you hoped readers might use it?

EB/KG: We really wanted to connect the latest academic research with leadership on the ground. We both had friends who had been thrust into difficult, busy, leadership positions with little training and little time to read the vast quantities of research out there. We also work with some amazing young people around the world, who are leading social action projects and passionate about changing the world. We therefore wanted to write a book that would be accessible to busy people, but was deeply rooted in good research and science.

NB: Do you have a message for BACP Workplace readers who will be leaders of some description; in their workplaces, families and communities?

EB/KG: Keep dreaming! Don't forget why you (and the people you lead) first went into that role and what excites you most about it. We love this quote: 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.' It's adapted from Antoine de Saint Exupery's book, *Citadelle*.

Also, remember that if you can make sure that you flourish, and then help your people to flourish, you will get the best performance in the long run.

The most powerful determinant of that flourishing, which is within your control, is probably the quality

of the relationships. So, focus on building strong positive relationships by serving and loving people. And if you are ever unsure what to do, then just listen to people.

NB: Do you have a hunch about how the pandemic will continue to impact on work and the task of leadership?

EB/KG: With so much change ahead and more home working, we have to move from a culture of top-down accountability to empowerment. When you can't control people and watch over their shoulder in an office, you have to trust them, and that's where character becomes increasingly important. We believe character is destiny and determines success in work and life, both at an individual level but also at an organisational level. Talent can bring success, but only character can keep it. Our prediction is that the task of leadership in the future will increasingly be about recruiting for character and then creating cultures where people can flourish and grow in character.

NB: You're offering a timely and free course, titled 'Leading and Flourishing in Difficult Times', at www.leaderknowloveinspire.com. Who is it for and why is it free?

EB/KG: We had the idea to write a course to help everyone who was leading in such difficult times. We contacted some experts in this field, Ed Brooks at the Oxford Character Project and Matt Lee at the Harvard Human Flourishing Programme. Amazingly, they were keen to work with us, and we then invited various academics, researchers and awesome leaders (in finance, healthcare, sport etc) to get involved.

It was an incredible privilege to work together on the course, and we made it free because we wanted to reach as many people as possible, and because so many are facing financial stress and uncertainty at the moment. ●

Leader: Know, love and inspire your people is published by Crown House Publishing.

<https://www.crownhouse.co.uk/publications/leader>