

## Crash Course in Selling Your Leadership

(The Leadership Story)



It's about sharing the story that reveals the journey you took other businesses on.

#### **Crash Course in Selling Your Leadership**

We are in the toughest executive job market in 100 years. Your next employer's core requirement for the position you will be seeking, above all others, is probably 'Leadership'. Your core offering likewise beyond your strategy and specialist skills, is also 'Leadership'. Why then, do most executives so poorly communicate their leadership value? How can we better define and package Leadership as a real, tangible and distinctive offering? How can we better communicate it to differentiate ourselves from competitors?

The true test of a leader is never a simple list of attributes but rather the journey these leaders take their teams on — from the beginning to the end and including all the challenges in between. It is all about sharing this via your own personal 'Leadership Story'.

As a 'Leadership Candidate', your primary strategy in securing a leadership role is to differentiate your leadership by demonstrating how through it, you have captured the visions and objectives of your previous employers.

The reason attributes alone are not a good indication of leadership is because you are not necessarily a leader if you for example know how to motivate, can inspire, have integrity, are great at compiling strategy, or 'get results.' Just because executives have these attributes in no way proves they are a leader; though these may be common attributes you would expect a leader to possess.

Besides, it is assumed that most senior executive candidates the interviewer is interviewing already have these basic attributes; otherwise, they would not be interviewing them.

Analysts and business consultants may be great strategists, but they may not be good at leading a Team. A salesperson may be great at motivating customers to buy but may be very poor at leading a Sales Division. Likewise, a treasurer may have integrity but no talent for leading a Finance Division.

Companies are approached by thousands of candidates many who claim to be leaders; so how do you stand out and differentiate your leadership?

If a CEO gives you the keys to their business, in what direction and to what destination will you take them? Will you take them on a journey of discovery, creation, high accomplishment and personal

fulfillment or on a trail of destruction, apathy, and disillusionment? How will you steer the ship? Will you practice good corporate stewardship?

How can you first define and package, to then communicate and differentiate your leadership to secure superior leadership career opportunities faster?

This Training Module, 'Crash Course in Selling Your Leadership,' is designed to help Executive Job Seekers who are specifically seeking Leadership Roles. It is written for leaders who seek to better define and communicate their leadership talent in interviews as a clear, concise, powerful, and almost tangible offering to brand themselves as Leadership Assets. Many executives reading this article will already be very good at selling their leadership. We trust this will help you do this even more powerfully.

It's not the best leaders that get the best leadership opportunities, but rather those who can best sell their leadership.

#### Are you a Leader or a Manager?

Many people that interview you for a Leadership role are they themselves leaders, for example a CEO interviewing an Executive General Manager. Bearing in mind that often 'people don't know what they don't know'; many CEOs don't know how to interview for 'Leadership'.

Let's see how well you currently communicate your leadership talent by use of this simple test.

#### The Leadership Litmus Test

This test indicates how well you communicate your leadership to interviewers.

If a CEO interviewing you asked you,

"I need a leader first, not simply another specialist or middle manager; why are you a leader?", how would you answer in a way that proves your leadership so that the interviewer really 'gets it' without merely stating ambiguous common off-the-cuff attributes like, "I motivate, I inspire, I'm a great strategist, I've been a CEO for nearly 10 years now, people tell me I am a great leader" or "my reputation speaks for itself."

In response to being asked similar leadership questions, most leadership candidates only talk of 'leadership attributes'—motivating, inspiring, their aptitude for strategic planning, getting results, and their marvellous implementation skills—all the standard giveaways and one-liners. Some of the problems with only describing your leadership by mentioning attributes are:

- It is what almost every leader being interviewed claims to have; they don't differentiate you,
- · Attributes are 'fluffy' and subjective,
- Describing attributes lacks credibility in that attributes do not give testament to your leadership value,
- Attributes do not describe the journey, the ups and downs, challenges, obstacles, issues, that you had to take businesses on previously, and
- Similarly, mentioning Achievements and Responsibilities doesn't necessarily communicate your leadership. Doubt this?

culture, or that you led the team from a state of apathy to a state of apathy, or on a journey of high growth from having a market share of 20% to a market share of 20%...

Following on from this, how does claiming you motivate and inspire teams whilst not describing the journey (the beginning, middle, and end point) you took these teams on, adequately describe your leadership in taking people on successful journeys? What good is it claiming to have leadership attributes if you cannot share a story of how you used those attributes in taking a team on a journey? It's kind of like telling a work colleague have just had a holiday but not describing the holiday you went on.

The best indication of your leadership talent very obviously is a story of the journey you led a previous team on, if not, what else is there?

Inserting this short story in your Strategic Leadership Resume insert it front of mind enabling you to then recall it and then use it strategically in interviews, in communicating your Leadership, expertise in growing businesses and your ROI.

A candidate may have amazing achievements but what we do not know is what proportion of these achievements are attributable to an increase in budget, a changing economy, a more aggressive growth mandate from the CEO or the work of their predecessor. Mentioning achievements

responsibilities without a Leadership Story does not communicate the bigger picture—what was actually involved in capturing each achievement or fulfilling each responsibility, certainly what journey, as a leader, you took another business or team on.

Describing your attributes not only does not give the interviewer a genuine and powerful reason for hiring you.

There have been hundreds of books written on Leadership in the corporate world. Let us go back to the simple layman's definition of a leader.

To really drum this point home,

You cannot say you led your team on a journey of change from having a bad culture to having a bad

#### Leaders by definition LEAD PEOPLE!

In business, this means leaders lead a group of people...a business or a team. To lead you must take a team on a journey, from point A to point B, it's not a static point. It can't be from Point A to Point A. There's no journey in a static point.

The best indication of how you will perform as a leader is often your past performance as a leader.

Unfortunately, most people learn to write resumes at School, by their Mum and Dad, or a book. They use this advice when in applying for junior (non-leadership) roles, where everything is about responsibilities and achievements, not 'Leadership'.

The problem is, as you climb the corporate ladder and leave junior roles behind, successful interviewing becomes much more about communicating Leadership Value, Expertise in Growing Businesses and your ROI, more than simply your specialist skills. Companies have specialists but are in need of a leader to take these specialists on a journey to greater success.

# The best, most honest and simplest proof of your leadership is a story about the journeys you took previous teams on.

Often the most important question a CEO has on their mind when interviewing a leadership candidate is "Why are you a leader?" You need to answer this whether they verbalise this question or not; questions unanswered becomes often become objections.

Beat the interviewer to the punch and ask, "I understand Leadership is the primary requirement of this role. Are you wondering how effective my leadership is?" then answer with your Leadership Story. Don't wait for the CEO to ask you this and similar questions. Ask questions that point to your unique talent, leadership style, offerings, or skill set in order to highlight your unique leadership value...'join the dots'.

Once you have shared your leadership story, if appropriate, you may like to suggest to the CEO that they also ask other candidates this same question, knowing these are not good questions to be on the receiving end of, if you have not prepared how to answer them. Successful interviewing involves also setting up hurdles for your competitors. Bring to the interviewer's attention in a subtle manner how poorly other communicate their value. It's the 'War for Jobs' now; it's no longer a teddy bear's picnic.

Understand this. In this market there is an oversupply of great candidates. People interview candidates because it is generally evident the candidate can do the job. Interviewers tend not to interview candidates to see if they actually can do the job in this market.

Following on from this once a candidate has started being interviewed the only remaining obvious question is "Why should we hire you instead of someone else?" or simply, "What's unique about you?"

Many candidates fail, firstly because they do not answer this simple question sufficiently; why they represent (at least in perception) unique Leadership Value.

Secondly most candidates lack strategies to take other competing candidates out of the selection process.

#### The Purple Cow Analogy

Now let's give you a superior way of answering these very important leadership interview questions. To help you to answer these questions, you must understand the widely known marketing concept of Purple Cow as written by Seth Godin. Applying it to the job hunt, it goes something like this.

Imagine driving down a road one day on the way to work, passing a farm and seeing a herd of normal boring everyday brown cows eating grass, all different to each other, some with spots, some without spots. Would you go to work and tell everyone you saw a normal boring everyday brown cow? No. Your colleagues would hardly find this interesting. The next day you drive down the same road and you see a Purple Cow. You can't believe your eyes. You jump out of the car, run up to it and realise it's genuinely a one-of-a-kind Purple Cow! It's remarkable and unique. You tell your work colleagues and they scramble to see this UNIQUE creature. The lesson being:

All candidates are different. However if employers think you're just different, not UNIQUE, this means you're effectively invisible.

Wondering how often candidates poorly communicate their uniqueness? Next time you interview a candidate for a leadership role, sit back and watch how they describe how similar they are to every other candidate.

Ask your work colleagues or friends "Why are you unique?" or ask them "If a CEO interviewed you for a leadership role and asked you why you're a leader?" Listen to their responses...exactly what you thought they were going to say.

Create the perception of your leadership that you want others to have of you.

## The perception then becomes the reality. Introduce them to your Leadership Story.

It is the author's belief that many talented leadership candidates unknowingly mislead interviewers into believing they are less talented than they really are by not adequately describing their Leadership Journeys. Make your Leadership Offering very clear, concise, and tangible.

#### SO WHAT'S YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY?

All journeys have a beginning and an end point. Many say success is a journey not a destination. Your leadership success is thus all about your previous leadership journeys, not merely your leadership attributes, e.g., "I can inspire, I can motivate, I can prepare strategic plans..." etc.

Describing your Leadership Journey in your Strategic Leadership Resume is a great revision exercise. This also ensures your Leadership Story (also known as your 'Leadership Sales Pitch') is front of mind for to you to then use as a weapon in differentiating your value in interviews.

Now that we have hopefully convinced you on the need to and benefits of including a Leadership Story in your Resume and then sharing it in interviews, what are the sequence and parts of a Leadership Story?

### SEQUENCE AND PARTS OF A LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Let's look at how a General Manager may compile their Leadership Story. A Leadership Journey is broken up into the following stages:

#### **The Start Point**

Most CEOs prefer to hire GMs that have come from great companies assuming great companies give people great experience that the CEO can now cash in on. Where did you begin? Do you describe the quality

of your previous companies in your resume or in interviews? Do you build a picture of having worked for great companies, bad companies or unknown companies? Of note there are no perfect ones.

If your previous employers weren't 'great,' just mention their positive points. Importantly, especially in this market, Recruiters usually prefer to interview candidates from well-known employers; if yours isn't you will need to emphasise why it is a quality company even if not well known.

"Mr CEO, many CEOs feel the quality of experience of those on their Leadership Team is in part due to the quality of their previous employers. I don't know what you know about ACMCE but do you mind I share with you their sophistication and complexity to give you an indication of the experience I can bring to your team?"

#### Who Hired You into Your Previous Roles?

CEOs prefer to hire people that have also been handpicked and personally mentored by other notably intelligent and powerful people in business; it reduces their hiring risk and makes them feel more comfortable in hiring you. Ever asked a salesman, "Before I buy your product who else bought it?", only to be comforted upon hearing some people you think well of also bought the product.

So who hired you? Was it the Office Manager or a well-renowned CEO of a leading global corporation? Who in affect 'invested' in you or mentored you? Noting this point in your resume and again in the interview highlights, "People who have an eye for building great teams have hired me...surely they can't all be wrong!"

Introduce this point of differentiation in interview by posing the question;

"Mr CEO, great CEOs tend to hire great people. My previous CEOs ranged from...., Joe Blow the CEO of ACME hired me. Joe is notably known for ....and became a personal mentor of mine"

What Problems, Issues, or Frustrations Were Previous Employers Experiencing at the Time that They Hired You?

Different to middle management, the issues, problems, frustrations and challenges that face leaders are usually very similar across companies and industries.

How do we sell the vision and mission to the staff,

enhance the brand, unite the stakeholders, revitalise the culture, restructure for success, anticipate trends, become industry pioneers, differentiate ourselves, lead the industry, attract superior talent, improve the stock price, practice good governance, increase market share, create shareholder value, and create Blue Oceans of Demand?

(Book Recommendation: "Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant", by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne)

Do you describe the issues, problems, frustration, or challenges that your previous employers faced knowing that at the leadership level they are very similar to the issues the CEO interviewing you is likely to be facing?

Do you think CEOs prefer to hire people that have intimate experience in solving very similar issues, problems, frustration and challenges to those they are currently facing as opposed to unrelated ones. If so, include it in your Leadership Story to then highlight in interviews.

Introduce this point of differentiation in interview by posing the question;

"Mr CEO, would you feel more comfortable in hiring a GM that's worked in other companies facing very similar issues to those you're currently facing? Are you looking for this intimacy of experience?"

## Why Did Previous Leaders Hire You Instead of Any Other Candidates?

The second question a CEO is probably wondering after is, "What's so UNIQUE about you that if we don't hire you this business may regret it?"

You need to answer this question directly with clarity and proof. So give the interviewer your Leadership Story that proves why other companies would have also regretted not hiring you. Point out in your resume (thus making it front of mind) why other employers (from recollection or assumption) hired or promoted you instead of other candidates or colleagues.

The employer probably has just been through an exhaustive search and selection process, over several months, culling maybe scores of candidates; a lot of time and money has been invested, and they are still ultimately taking a gamble on who to hire. If this

question is not asked of you, you need to ask it of the interviewer.

(In a humble yet confident voice, after you have built rapport and established some trust) You may like to ask,

Introduce this point of differentiation in interview by posing the question;

"Mr. CEO, can I be so bold as to ask, are you wondering why if you don't hire me this business may regret the decision? The reason I ask this is that's what my previous CEO, Joe Simple of ABC Corporation, was also wondering when he interviewed me. You may know of ABC Corporation, a corporation similar to yours that (sell the sizzle on the previous business and if possible its similarities). Joe invited me on board at a time in his business when they were facing very similar issues, problems, and challenges to your own corporation like...and tackling problems with...Joe, with the full backing of the Board, hired me after acknowledging my unique talent in...I understand this to be the talent you're now seeking" etc.

Or

"Mr CEO, to state something obvious; this whole interview process is all about finding you your best GM. Would it help you if I took a few moments to share with you why other notable CEOs facing similar issues and challenges as a you do, hire and promoted me instead of other candidates?" (kick-arse question).

If the CEO doesn't see your intellect in asking this questions he's probably a few brain cells short of a water melon.

How would you answer this question in an interview if you haven't compiled your own Leadership Story?

Remember, this is a question you need to ask the CEO especially because other competing candidates won't be able to answer it should the CEO ask them the same question. Eliminate the competition by setting up questions your competitors will have problems answering.

#### What Mandate Were You Given?

Leaders are given mandates, whereas managers are given more responsibilities and juniors are given tasks (we acknowledge these overlap).

Were your previous mandates to enhance the brand, set up an Asian platform, downsize the business,

Focus on differentiating your value but also on sabotaging competitors. This ain't no gentleman's' sport. It's not bloody lawn bowls or crochet.

'There can only be one', if you're fan of the Highlander movies.

establish a world-class sales culture, capture a further ten percent of the market, or build new markets?

If the CEO is considering hiring you surely they are wondering what your previous mandates were. If you haven't highlighted this in your Leadership Resume; why not? Competitors may be highlighting how similar their previous mandates were, how do you stack up?

Introduce this point of differentiation in interview by posing the question;

"Mr CEO, re you more likely to hire a GM who has previously been given and excelled in delivering on similar mandates to those you're about to give your next GM? The reason why I ask is my previous mandates ranged x to x; ask these not very similar?"

#### **Leaderships Styles**

(To be included in the body of your Leadership Resume). How as a leader did you lead, affect change, transform the culture, unite the team, sell the vision, set the direction, conceive the strategy, enhance the brand, plan the path, influence the future, establish and capture goals, build the business through its people, etc.?

#### What was your leadership style?

"With values like 'seeing change as evolution crucial for innovation and growth, thinking big and appreciating the contributions of all staff,' charismatically 'led from the trenches,' transformed the organisation beginning firstly with their state of mind, turning managers into leaders while expecting managers also to manage..." etc.

(Recruiters may not see the need to include your Leadership Style in your resume. They however are not the Board who are more particular about Leadership Talent; they will want to be convinced of yours.)

Introduce this point of differentiation in interview by posing the question;

"Mr CEO may I ask what leadership style do you most enjoy from those on your Leadership Team? (Let them answer). The reason I ask this is (it's in my resume), my Leadership Style has been described by other CEOs as being ..."

#### Return on Investment (ROI).

It is logical that if you are asking for a high six-figure salary from the CEO, the CEO is wondering, "What's in it for us? What's our ROI?"

Have you mentioned meaningful figures (dollars and percentages and times) in your resume that give testament to your ROI to previous employers?

Most recruiters will ask candidates what their biggest achievement is and then gauge their talent based on this. We're lot wiser and don't believe that achievements are necessarily a great gauge of talent.

Maybe those candidates in reception have more notable achievements than you because they had bigger budgets, worked with a more aggressive and talented Board or their predecessor may have laid all the ground work for them. Following this they are more likely to hire GMs that can remove their obstacles to growth.

Why then have you not highlighted the obstacles to growth you remove for businesses in your resume? Doing so will also bring them front of mind interviews. Common sense is all!

CEOs don't care so much about what you've done but what you can do. They have a vision, are under pressure to return value to shareholders and are frustrated with the obstacles they're facing in restricting the speed and ease in which they achieve their vision.

Before an Up takes a Member to market, their strategic marketing documents are prepared, which include your leadership story, including in this your Return on Investment, to, in other words,

#### **SHOW THEM THE MONEY!**

(We are not big fans of the movie Gerry Maguire!)

Very few senior executives explain adequately how they have increased profits and grown businesses.

**Increasing profit** is only possible through either:

- Increasing revenue or
- Cutting costs.

**Growing the Business** is only possible through the following four methods:

- I. Increasing acquisition of the right types of customers through organic growth or M&A,
- II. Increasing margins, (be it by slashing costs or increasing the quality of the output to be able to successfully charge a sustainably higher price),
- III. Increasing the frequency of purchase of customers, or
- IV. Reducing the loss of customers to natural attrition or to competitors.

Very few executive job seekers spell out their ROI or how they grew businesses in a simple and understandable way. You need to include where appropriate, percentages, figures, and time frames if known. If you don't know these exactly, use words like 'around,' 'up to,' 'in excess of,' 'more than,' etc.

## The Two Most Important Rules in Leadership Interviews

The trick with interviewing is that you can be as proud, charismatic and passionate as is suited to the situation (and interviewer's personality) but only on these two very strict conditions:

**1. You're honest.** Funny enough, most candidates unknowingly mislead interviewers in that they undersell themselves saying to the interviewer that they are a brown cow instead of a **PURPLE COW**, and

(Under communicating your value on purpose or by neglect is still being misleading, though unintentionally).

#### 2. Give most credit to your team (if possible).

As a leader who knows that success is usually a product of a good team, you need to share credit for your success with your previous teams. This creates a persona of a leader who is humble yet confident, one

who is obsessed with leading his team. Also, interviewers will assume the team's success was in result from your leadership.

Chinese business people will generally only listen to people if they're also humble.

#### What Legacy Did You Leave Behind?

(The end point)

Did you leave the business considerably better off? Did you solve the issues, problems, frustrations, and challenges the business was facing when they initially hired you? Did you achieve your mandate? Did you take the business and the people on a journey of discovery, creation, high accomplishment, and personal fulfilment or did you leave behind a trail of destruction, apathy, and regret? Did the business continue to flourish long after you left as a result of the changes you put in place?

Having your legacies front of mind enables you to ask the questions, "Frank, would you feel more comfortable hiring a CFO that has left his previous employers considerably better off than when they first started? Someone who has achieved their mandates and removed the obstacles to growth that their employer was challenged with? Someone who has implemented measures to ensure sustained success long after they have left?" Yes, "The reason why I ask this is..." (then share some legacies).

#### **SUMMARY**

Earlier, we claimed that very few HRMs, Recruiters, and at times CEOs know how to interview for leadership. The questions below would appear to be very simple common sense questions to ask of a leadership candidate. How many times have you been asked these or have you yourself asked these in interviewing people for leadership appointments?

"How were the previous businesses you worked with similar to ours?" or "In what ways were your previous employers remarkable (as indication of unique experience they may have passed on to you?")

"Who personally hired you for these previous roles and why?"

"How were previous businesses you worked with facing similar issues, problems, frustrations, or challenges to ours?" "Why did they hire you instead of other candidates?" or "What unique and relevant value did they identify you as having different to other candidates?"

"What mandates did they give you?" (How are these similar to those we will be giving the successful candidate?)

"How did you, through using the team as a 'tool' go about solving these issues, problems, challenges, and frustrations in achieving your mandate? How did you build on the business' strengths to capture opportunities? How did you reduce their weaknesses and lessen the threats or mitigate the risk?"

"What was your ROI? How did you increase profit and grow the business" (using the points in page 6)

"What legacy did you leave behind?" or

"What did the business look like when you left? Had you achieved your mandate? Had you solved the problems, frustrations, issues, and challenges the business was initially facing?"

Often interviewers fail to ask the right questions. If

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you are not asked the previous questions and you have the perfect answers and know that other competing candidates don't, you may like to ask the interviewers the questions. Ensure you do it in a respectful and well-meaning manner. This is in part how you control or steer the interview in a tactful way to a more mutually meaningful outcome; ask leading questions of relevance.

The way in which you ask questions will be dependent on the 'tone' of the interview and personalities of the interviewers.

#### **Broad Leadership Stories.**

Broad Leadership Stories follow the same structure as individual leadership stories, only, instead of being a story about one specific employer the Broad Leadership Story covers your last say ten years of employment. Broad Leadership stories can be used in introducing yourself, in explaining why you feel people should hire you, and more importantly in setting a strong precedent of why people have hired you for your leadership skills; this will in their minds reduce their perceived hiring risk.

#### An example of a Broad Leadership Story follows:

"Over the past ten years I've captured a wealth of experience internationally in Transformation and Operations across industry leading iconic groups the likes of ABC and XYZ Corporations to smaller groups like MNO and DEF; businesses renowned for leading innovation in agricultural technology.

Looking back, I've most often been sort out by Board Members, more often than not leading CEOs such as Joseph Collins, a mentor of mine who was applauded by the industry for his successful turnaround of RST Corporation saving it from imminent collapse.

Most of my previous employers at the time they hired me were facing issues identifying new markets, regardina retardant cultures and challenges commercialising products and exorbitant costs.

Most hired me after acknowledging my unique skills in restructuring and turning around businesses, streamlining operations globally and strategising the way forward.

mandates have generally centred My transformation, slashing costs, commercialising and capturing new growth markets through 'growth leadership'.

Of note at XYZ my team captured 20% of the US Agriculture market (an 80% on previous year); at MNO we brought on board ten new distributorships responsible for an additional \$200Million in revenue.

Reflecting back on my legacies over the last ten years, I am proud to have left my employers considerably better off with the strategies, the people and structure, the roadmap and the culture for sustainable growth despite the state of the global economy in part."

Your Agent may organise for some specialist writers to compile your Strategic Leadership Resume for you.