



## The evolving leader today, ‘the times they are a changin’ ”

By Steve Watson, Managing Director, Stanton Chase; Dallas

For those of us who were around in the 1960s, there is perhaps no greater or appropriate ballad than Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A Changin’ ”. While the focus of that song was on social unrest, today it could very well reflect the changing dynamics of leadership in Corporate America. There is certainly a “revolution” happening and if leaders of today hope to impact organizations tomorrow they must adapt strategies, recognize and accept change, and boldly move forward with a new leadership style. And while this isn’t a treatise on leadership, my hope is that it will raise topics that can influence corporate policies, direction, and talent.

Let's take a look at some of the forces that are influencing leadership changes and why leaders must evolve. Technology has changed the work environment and has enabled new ways of doing things. It has created global interconnectivity, people interconnectivity, instant data and information anywhere anytime, collaboration tools, giving everyone a video camera, and allowing new competitors with lower barriers to entry. We have endless consumer choices today. Mid-management layers have been eliminated so top management today is closer to individual contributors. Leaders must evolve with four different generations in the workforce with real diversity, multiple and different motivations, and mixed demographics. This brings challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining talent.

The first step is to realize that some of the "old style leadership" practices have become obsolete. Some of these old style practices include:

- Top down management
- Doing it my way or the company way; being directive and controlling
- Rigid management style - micromanaging
- Decisions made at the top
- Defined work with individual work units
- More time in the office and with inner circles
- Expected loyalty
- Annual performance reviews and raises

We must realize that in 2003 we had no iPhone, Facebook, Chatter, Twitter, Text, Snapchat, Instagram, and other social media that have significantly altered the way people connect, communicate, and build relationships.

Leadership today must change and evolve with the changing times. Let's take a look at what is one of the most important factors – a workforce of Millennials (Gen Y) of about 86 million workers, now the largest generation in the work force. They are the ones that we must lead because they will – and in many cases are – making an important impact on Corporate America. Consider the following with Millennials:

1. There is no psychological contract with their employer; they are less loyal. They have a different way of viewing a job - a means to do other things (travel, leisure time with family and friends, community service).
2. They are team and group oriented; collaborative in their work style.
3. They want to hear from senior management; they want feedback and open communications, and recognition.

4. They want flexible work hours and work-life balance. They want time to enjoy life outside of work. Many enjoy working remotely. Working spouses will be the norm, so they will need time flexibility for home and children's needs.
5. They are creative and inquisitive – they will ask “why”. Knowing “why” is very important to this generation. They will challenge ideas, methods, processes, and status quo.
6. They want to improve and grow professionally; they want training and mentoring.
7. They are service oriented, care about the environment, and will be on social media – allow them to do these.
8. Most important, they want to make a difference and want to change the world.

At the core of these changes is, of course, technology. It allows people to work remotely, collect information immediately, collaborate effectively, and have access to global markets and information. Employees also have access to new jobs, making talent retention more challenging today than ever before. So, a workforce with technology at their fingertips presents daunting challenges for today's leaders from older generations. You must adapt and evolve or reconcile yourself to the scrap heap of dinosaur-like former leaders.

Old-style leadership is not the right profile today. Under old-style leadership today, employees are not as productive, creativity is dampened and Millennials will not work for old-style leadership. Old-style leadership is unsustainable. People today want to be heard, engaged, productive, fulfilled, challenged, and trusted.

I refer to today's leadership as the “Evolved Leader” who has adapted to the changing times and have the following traits and skills:

- Strategic thinker, but hands on and in the details - thinks and balances strategy and execution.
- Leads by example; builds relationships.
- Communicates mission, vision, and goals.
- Builds high performing teams; a coach and mentor; promotes his/her people.
- A servant leader: one who supports his/her people - how can I help you? Looks for and knocks down barriers.
- One with no ego; a true team player who is collaborative and can move across the organization. A listener - a listener with empathy.
- Gets input from diverse views, gains consensus, and gets alignment.
- Embraces diversity and is multi-cultural.
- Is connected and available, anytime, and with an open door policy.
- Is flexible and agile - can deal with ambiguity.

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- Brings exceptional communication skills - with clarity. Communicates up-down and across the organization frequently and transparently.
- Is accepting of failure – teaches and learns from it.
- Moves the needle - drives results and gets things done. Is resilient.

It goes without saying that the Evolved Leader has impeccable integrity, honesty at all times, and unquestioned business and personal ethics.

That's not to say that leaders of previous generations don't have these characteristics. It's just that today they are more front-and-center in the evaluation process and are constantly visible and being watched at all times.

In our work as global search consultants we are seeing these forces at work on a daily basis. We are finding that the best candidates are those who embrace change and don't long for the "good old days."

We are continually looking for those candidates who acknowledge these changes and accept them. The best candidates are those who recognize these changes and can document how their leadership abilities have evolved.

Consider some of the following of today's corporate leadership stars. They understand leveraging the following using the technological tools, and acknowledge and respect the cross-generational work styles and motivations. They get that:

- Social Networks can gauge the opinions of a group anywhere, anytime.
- Technology channels offer more frequent communications and responses, and can be more personalized.
- Digital platforms are where organizations can highlight successes, new knowledge, new products/services, customer intimacy and service, product instructions, thought leadership articles.
- Different generations are motivated and work differently.
- People are more creative and can take initiatives and be entrepreneurial without previously required thresholds or consequences.

While this is a broad topic, my hope is that this piece identifies issues that are helpful in evolving leaders to a new leadership style. Leaders of today must accept these changes and evolve because as we have said, "The Times They Are A Changin'."

Steve Watson is the Managing Director of the Stanton Chase Dallas office, and previously served as International Chairman. Stanton Chase is a global retained executive search firm with over 70 offices in 45 countries.

**For more information, contact:**



## Steve B. Watson

Managing Director

[s.watson@stantonchase.com](mailto:s.watson@stantonchase.com)

+1 972-455-9211

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