

To lead is to care!

*“People need to **know** you care”*

John O. Burdett



What makes a leader? High on any agenda - using a term coined by Warren Bennis - is that, “Leaders are dreamers with a deadline.” One thinks immediately of NASA and *John F. Kennedy*. Authenticity and fairness loom large ... *Gandhi*. Energy and passion are clearly essential ... *Teddy Roosevelt*. Mental toughness and tenacity are important ... *Margaret Thatcher*. Compassion and a generosity of spirit ...

Nelson Mandela. The deep-rooted and unshakable belief that no matter what the pundits, critics and naysayers might suggest - **it will** happen ... *Sergio Marchionne*.¹ And in a boundaryless world, the capacity to operate in different cultures cannot be ignored... *Jorma Ollilan*.²

What makes a leader? It has been said that there is no such thing as a great leader, only those who rise to great challenges ... *Rudy Giuliani* in the period immediately following September 11th. Leadership is a sacred trust. It is a trust that has to be won every single day. Leadership is thus about followship. And when all is said and done, people want to follow a leader who cares. People want to follow someone who is more than a figurehead, more than an instrument of shareholder value, more than the manifestation of a set of competencies. Not

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¹ CEO of Fiat

² Chairman and CEO of Nokia

someone who cares one day and not the next. Not someone who cares for some people and not others. And not someone who thinks that they care. If you wear the mantle of leadership, people need to **KNOW** you care.



To care is a deep-rooted, authentic, consistent way to be. Simply put: to lead is to care! Moreover, the greater the pool of knowledge that rests with those who do not control the budget, the greater the need for caring leadership. To care is to build comfort with a world that unfolds in unpredictable ways. It is to realize that there is no such thing as sustainable competitive advantage and

that comfort in a “plan” is to be wedded to yesterday’s solution. To care is to know that only those who can see what isn’t there can deliver what cannot be done. To care is to anticipate what is the worst thing the competition can do and do it first.

To care is to act and do so in tune with the rhythm of the market place. To care is to realize that the only thing that is unchanging is change itself and that victory is reserved for those who embrace and relish change. To care is to work to become ever-more adaptable, flexible, and fleet of foot. To care is to know that in a world where change is an ever-present reality, in-depth and/or extensive analysis is a luxury time rarely affords. To care is to discover new ways to learn. To compete is to learn faster than the competition.

To care is to recognize that flair leads to the discovery of *the what*, values underscore *the why*, pragmatism orchestrates *the where*, opportunity dictates *the when*, but it is integrity that dictates ***the how***. Integrity is manifest in high ethical standards, an emphasis on individual responsibility and a respectful working environment. Honesty, transparency, moral courage, independence of judgment, impartiality and fairness are words that capture the spirit of integrity. Leadership without integrity is an empty promise.

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To care is to dream. To care is to know that to lead is to compete for other people’s dreams. Caring is thus a quest that seeks to rid the workplace of work that strips people of dignity. Caring leads to the assumption that given the chance “people will get it right.” Caring embraces freedom to act not simply as a means to improve productivity, but because it nurtures the human condition. Caring draws on the belief that people want to produce quality work. Caring builds on the belief that given the opportunity people will always strive to improve the processes that they influence. To care is to know that the greatest barriers to organizational success lies in the unnecessary rules and outdated procedures that those handed the reigns of power cling to, to maintain their status and feelings of self-worth.

To care is to have a continuous drive for better results. To care is set and meet goals that others merely aspire to. This means that a commitment is absolute and that growth, in its many forms, is the wellspring of sustained success.

To care is to have top of mind that what a leader does is far more important than anything he/she may say. To care is therefore to be always conscious of how even small acts will be

interpreted. To care is to be a role model. To care is to challenge the status quo and in doing so give others permission to explore new ways to act.

To care is to listen to the customer. To care is to gain insights into the customer's world. To care is to anticipate the customer's emerging needs. To care is to respond with not just a solution, but with the *best possible* solution. To care is to always deliver a little more than that agreed. To care is to question conventional wisdom, to embrace new ideas and to provide space and freedom in order that the imagination of those who serve the customer can take flight. To care is to nurture those who have the courage and daring to go where others have not walked. To care is to talk the customer's language. To care is to act on the belief that *servicing* is more important than *service*.



To care is to regularly revisit the organization's value proposition. To care is to stand behind the brand. To care is to make the brand live not just in the customer's eyes, but also inside the organization.

To care is strip out the barriers between supplier and customer. To care is to know that to be a partner is to share information. To care is to keep the customer informed. To care is to provide timely information. To care is to provide real-time access to information that is critical to the customer's needs.

To care is to have pride in the product and share that pride with others. To care is to know that issues such as product reliability are sacrosanct. To care is to bring integrity to the sales process and to honor the spirit...not just the letter of any consumer promises. To care is to continuously explore ways to enhance the utility of the company's product and/or service. To care is to act with the knowledge that reputation is hard won but easily lost.

To care is to realize that leadership demands stamina. To care is therefore to take health, fitness and wellness seriously. To care is to exercise and eat right. To care is to provide the opportunity for others to do likewise.

To care is to be wedded to the belief that the collaborative efforts of people working together far outweigh the value of any individual. To care is thus to work collaboratively, to enrich global networks and actively share experiences to better satisfy the customer. To care is to act on the belief that the best "structure"

reflects the way people would choose to work together were they given the opportunity to self-organize. In that the creativity of the human mind can always find ways to circumvent the unnecessary and the unwanted, to care is to know that even well meaning attempts to control others are always self-defeating. To care is to make processes as user friendly and non-bureaucratic as possible.

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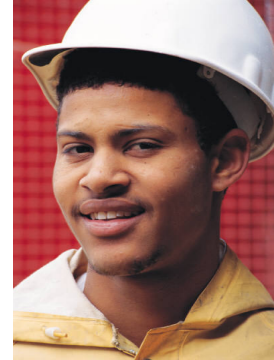
To care is to know that it takes the capacity for self-deprecation to wear the demands of leadership with humility. To care is to have a teachable point of view. To care is to work on the assumption that how people learn is more important than what they learn. To care is to coach. To care is to find the time to be *available* and the state of mind to be *present*. To care is to ask questions that allow others to see the world through a new lens. To care is to create the context such that people coach themselves. To care is to be a mentor. To care is to have a successor.

“To care is to embrace diversity as a means to enrich the spirit of innovation.”

To care is to act on the belief that leadership is about building community. Community, in turn, speaks to how people share ideas. How they build on each other’s success. How the spirit of competition urges people to the next plateau of performance. Caring is to emphasize that community is not about everyone being the same but is a container for diversity. To care is to embrace diversity as a means to enrich the spirit of innovation. To care is know that the customer is part a wider a community. To care is to embrace that community when developing new products and services.

To care is to constantly seek ways to simplify. For those who care, simplicity is found in easy to understand goals; policies and procedures that describe only that which are absolutely necessary; and feedback that focuses on issues that the receiver can influence. Simplicity is found in a passion to tear down hierarchy and strip out boundaries that limit what is possible. Simplicity is realized when the customer finds the product/service easy to access and easy to use. To care is to understand that simplicity is, in the first instance, a state of mind. To care is to know that there is a world of difference between simplicity and simplistic. One is to strive for elegant solutions. The other is to create a simple product/service but in doing so forgo fitness for purpose.

Caring is manifest in the passion to hire and promote the best. To care is to know that every hire decision is central to the legacy that a leader leaves behind. To care is to strive to identify world-class executive search partners and work with them as if they were indeed “partners.” To care is to identify role specific competencies in line with the emerging culture. To care is to hone one’s interview skills. To care is to support newcomers as they seek to integrate themselves into the culture.



“To care is to communicate not what people need to know, but what they have a right to know.”

To care is to communicate not what people need to know, but what they have a right to know. To care is to ask people how they feel. To care is share your own feelings. To care is to find the time to listen. To care is to listen *for* and not to listen *to*. To care is to see the world through the eyes of others. To care is to be vulnerable. To care is to ask for help. To care is to offer help. To care is to be compassionate when others stumble. To care is to offer advice only when it’s asked for. To care is to see the misfortunes of others and

realize...there but for the grace of God go I. To care is to be humble. To care is to be approachable. To care is to be human. To care is to know when to say no!

To care is to put the needs of others first. To care is to take pride in the success of one's colleagues. To care is to want to pass the winning post first but to also recognize that no one makes it on his/her own. To care is to live up to the expectations of the team. To care is to deliver on a promise.

To care is to realize that we live in a fragile ecosystem where every act has long-term consequences. To care is to fulfill the responsibility that goes with being a citizen of planet earth. To care is to leave the planet cleaner than we found it. To care is to build a world for our children that we can be proud of. To care is to know that as a leader we can and *must* make a difference.

To care is to be fully aware that without investors there would be no organization. To care is to honor that trust at all times. To care is to make the decisions of the organization transparent. To care is to work diligently to create value for those whose own hard work allows the organization to sustain.

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To care is to respect the truth. To care is to live in truth. To care is to be open and honest even when political expediency means that silence is the option others would choose. To care is to realize that timing is everything. To care is to act on the belief that confronting a problem is the first step in overcoming it.



To care is about balance. Caring is to respect the future that we are part of creating. Caring is honoring the past. To care is to share positive stories. To care is to strive to become a masterful storyteller. To care is to measure the right things. It is to live the organization's values. It is to learn to let go. To care is to know when to let go.

To care is to ask for feedback from others. To care is to act on that feedback. To care is to strive continuously to be the best you can be. To lead is to care. To lead is to have others know that you care.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." When we stop caring we stop living. When we stop caring about others we stop caring about ourselves. To be a leader is to care. To be an outstanding leader is to care deeply.

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50 Questions that say you care

The questions listed below are of necessity incomplete. They are not the product of a lengthy research project, nor are they intended to provoke hours of anxiety-ridden contemplation. The 50 questions listed are simply a way for you to think about what it means to be a caring leader. Go through the list carefully and consider each question. If the majority of the questions can be answered positively there still may be one or two ideas that you can build on. If there are more negative responses than positive, the suggestion is that you think very seriously about your leadership approach, style and ability to build followship.



1. Do you use hand written notes to say how much you appreciate an employee's contribution or ideas?
2. Do you apologize when you are wrong?
3. Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
4. Do you go out of your way to find out about what those who work for you are passionate about?
5. Do you attend meetings on time?
6. Do you leave a time when you will be available if you ask someone to call you back?
7. Do you go out of your way to let employees know what's going on?
8. Do you know the names of the children of those who work immediately for you?
9. Do you spend 30% plus of your time coaching?
10. Is your first thought when someone presents you with an idea how to make it happen rather than what's wrong with this?
11. Do you share your shortcomings with members of your team?
12. When the relationship with a colleague appears to be on rocky ground are you quick to bring up your concerns with him/her in a respectful way?
13. Do you personally take time out for reflection, to recharge your batteries and to draw out meaningful learning?

14. Are you currently reading a book on leadership?
15. Do you spend time with new colleagues to help them find their way?
16. Do you spend part of your time giving back to the community?
17. Are you good at remembering names?
18. Do you send e-mails only to those who absolutely need to receive them?
19. Do you actively promote talented members of your team to other leaders in the organization?
20. When employees are clearly on a fast learning curve are you quick to step out of the way?
21. Do you challenge those who don't live the values?
22. If asked, could you succinctly describe what tomorrow's success looks, feels and sounds like?
23. Do colleagues and members of your team have your home phone number?
24. Do you stay in touch with employees who have retired?
25. Are you known as someone who goes out of his/her way to share ideas?
26. When someone is stuck do you tend to be the person he/she reaches out to for help?
27. Do you send a get well card to a team member who is off sick?
28. Do you visit employees who are off work for an extended period of time?
29. Would you list listening as one of your major attributes?
30. When a colleague has delivered a great presentation do you go out of your way to quietly congratulate him/her?
31. Do you ask colleagues and team members for feedback?
32. Do you share your success with others by making them part of that success?
33. When employees are clearly not a fit for the role they are in, do you act quickly?

34. Would people call you “playful?”
35. Do you have a reputation for developing high potential employees?
36. Have you recently sent flowers to someone who helped you recently (sending flowers to a man creates a real impact) or a small gift to thank him/her?
37. Are you quick to find creative ways to celebrate the success of your team?
38. Does “we” and not “I” dominate your language?
39. Within the past 18 months have you brought forth ideas that help fulfill the organization’s responsibility to the environment?
40. Would others say you keep things simple?
41. Do you deal well with disappointment?
42. Is humor part of how you deal with tension?
43. Do you go of your way to catch people “doing it right?”
44. When others unjustly criticize a member of your team do you always go to bat for that person?
45. Do key employees regularly seek you out as a mentor?
46. Do others describe you as “authentic?”
47. Can you describe what you have done recently to help team members address work-life balance?
48. Are you consistent in the way you behave to others?
49. Do you seek out disabled or disadvantaged candidates when the opportunity permits?
50. Do you regularly attend company events even though other activities might be more appealing?

List three things that you could do on Monday morning that would emphasize *you care*. Do not be limited to the questions above

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John's book on executive integration *New Role, New Reality* was shortlisted as book of the year by the US Society of Human Resource Management. His book *Leaders Must Lead!* (published in 2003) reached #3 on one popular business best-seller list. His latest book *Myth, Magic, Mindset: a template for organizational culture change (2008)* is already in its second printing.