



IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED. . .

—STEPHEN PROSSER  
UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN

*University of Glamorgan, speech delivered on Tuesday, 11th May 2004*

This inaugural lecture is dedicated to the three most important women in my life (presented in strict chronological order!): my mother, Enid Mair Prosser; my sister, Jill Ellis; and my wife, Lesley. All of them have given me more than one chance to succeed.

*If at first you don't succeed. . .GIVE UP!*  
— Homer Simpson

When I left my South Wales grammar school at 16 years of age with the word *failure* firmly attached to me, it would have seemed inconceivable that 35 years later I would be standing in a university about to deliver my inaugural professorial lecture. My sense of failure at that time was real, and in many ways it stayed with me for over 30 years and only finally dissipated when I visited the Friends Reunited website and discovered what my contemporaries and fellow pupils had to say about that particular academic institution—and I use the word *academic* with a generosity of spirit. It was an abysmal experience and it is only my fear of the law of libel, and I suppose a sense of charity, that prevents me reading to you what those former pupils had to say about the teaching staff. That was before Friends Reunited had the opportunity of editing their comments!

I was fortunate: I had the opportunity of further chances and I grabbed hold of them with both hands. By means of evening classes and day release, and the magnificent efforts of Swansea and Warwick University, I



was able to obtain a respectable level of formal education. I also benefited substantially by learning from the people I worked with and from the interest they took in developing the limited talent they saw in me.

The process of learning continues—we all know that learning should never be considered in the past tense alone—and in recent times my learning has been associated with this university and with colleagues across the public and private sectors in Wales and beyond.

To work in an educational establishment is an honour. To work in one that believes in giving people a second chance is a privilege. For me there is also a family association with this part of the world. My paternal grandfather was born in Merthyr in the 1890s; he was orphaned at a young age and moved with his adoptive parents to Dowlais Top. He left school at 14, and after a short time at sea, became a miner for the rest of his working life. I know that he was proud of his roots, and he would have been so proud to know that his grandson was involved in education in his part of the world—although I am very pleased that my parents decided to ignore his wish that his one and only grandson be named Kier Hardy Prosser. My other grandfather wanted me to be called Evan Roberts Prosser after the great Welsh Revivalist of 1904!

*If at first you don't succeed, remove all evidence that you ever tried.*

— David Brent

Throughout my working life—whether in manufacturing or with the public sector in Wales and England—two themes have driven me continually: firstly, my belief in the merits of helping people to develop themselves (one boss even called me a development zealot); and, secondly, the theme of building effective organisations for the benefit of those who work in them, and far more importantly, for the public at large (Prosser, 2003).

The more I thought about this inaugural lecture the more convinced I became that I should speak from the heart, to tell you clearly what it is that I profess. What I have to say may not follow all the rigours and niceties of academic form. There may be instances where references are missing and



where evidence is passed over with indecent haste (but I won't be the first inaugural lecturer to do that, will I?). I want to tell you something I believe with a passion: it concerns people and the obligation we all have to treat them with respect; to provide them with opportunities to learn; and to grow, to develop, to contribute, and to see how their efforts prosper them, their families, and the organisations in which they work.

#### PEOPLE—THE MOST NEGLECTED OF ASSETS

Despite my difficulties with grammar school, I remember being taught about the agricultural and industrial revolutions. Our history teacher, who also taught us French and physical education, managed to bring various characters to life. I can still remember learning about changes that took place as a result of the exploits of men like 'Turnip' Townsend and Thomas Coke, and the wonderfully named Jethro Tull, a name later used by the 1960s rock band. The Industrial Revolution also had its set of heroes, and who can forget names such as James Hargreaves, Samuel Crompton, or Sir Richard Arkwright?

*If at first you don't succeed, failure may be your thing.*

— Anon.

Revolutions are not only a thing of years gone by. We, the people of the twenty-first century, are also living through a revolution, and it is one that is bringing changes to all our lives. The name of our revolution is the knowledge revolution. No one can place an exact date on when it started, but it is incontrovertible that we are living through a time of phenomenal change, in the workplace and in the home, and that much of the change is being driven by knowledge: the knowledge people have within them and the knowledge that resides within their organisations. As a result of this, knowledge has become power in much the same way that land, labour, and financial capital once were. The evidence shows that there has never been a time in the history of work when the 'intellectual capital' residing within



people has been of such paramount importance to the success or failure of the organisation. The day of human capital, to use that inelegant phrase, the day of recognising the assets residing within people, has finally arrived.

It means, amongst many other things, that the role of employees within the workplace is changing substantially. Listen to these words from Thomas Stewart, one of the leading authorities on the rise of the so-called *knowledge worker*, as he issues a challenge to management:

The rise of the knowledge worker fundamentally alters the nature of work and the agenda of management. Managers are custodians; they protect and care for the assets of the organisation; when the assets are intellectual, the manager's job changes. Knowledge work doesn't happen the way mechanical labour did. . .when work is about knowledge, the professional model of organisational design inevitably begins to supersede the bureaucratic. (Stewart, 1997)

You would think that organisations would realise how precious a commodity they have in the resource known as people, and as a result of that awareness, they would do everything in their power to encourage people to reveal their amazing talents. You would think that employers would have in place systems or working practices to allow them to tap into this incredible resource: the power of people.

Yet far too often, that is not the case. According to Swiss research (Stewart, 1997, p. 64), when CEOs are asked how much of the knowledge in their companies is used, they typically say, 'About 20 percent.' That figure refers to all types of knowledge, not just the knowledge of people, and can you imagine the benefits to a company if that number rose to just 30%?

Although I would be happy to lead a field study to Switzerland, I think I had better develop my argument by presenting you with evidence from nearer home. I am going to present three exhibits of evidence, from a very long list of evidence, to show that far too many organisations are guilty of squandering their most precious resource: the talent of their people.





#### Exhibit #1: Neglecting available talent

Four or five years ago I read of a management consultant who asked the employees of his clients, ‘How much of your talent is being used by your employers?’ The answer he got was usually, ‘About 50-60%.’ Quite frankly, I did not believe his figures, as they seemed to be far too low for me, and I decided to ask conference delegates a similar question when I spoke at their conferences. I asked, ‘How much of your available and appropriate ability is used by your organisation?’ I was always careful to explain what I meant by each of the words: *available* meant what they were prepared to give to their company; *appropriate* meant that the organisation needed them to give it; *ability* meant the talent, skills, knowledge or competence that they possessed; and *how much* was a request for a percentage figure. Of course, I gave them no indication of previous results. To my great surprise, I started getting similar answers. I have asked the question of hundreds of managers, from numerous organisations, and the typical answer I receive is an average figure of between 55% and 65%, and the range of responses is usually between 30% and 80%. When I started getting these results, I expressed my surprise to senior managers in various organisations, but they were not surprised at all, as they spent vast amounts of their time ‘wading through treacle’ (to use their words): they spent as much as half their time fighting internal systems that seemed to militate against their giving their best performance.

Recently, ORC International—an international opinion research company—allowed me access to the survey responses of 1.1 million employees in 150 organisations. The answers to survey Question 38—‘How satisfied are you with the training you received for your present job?’—were most revealing. They showed that on average only 57% were satisfied and that the responses ranged from 32% to 81%.

Do you see the picture that is emerging? Employees feel that about 40% of their available ability is not being used. Surveys show that about 40% of employees feel that they have not been trained adequately for the job they are to perform. I know that I am not comparing ‘apples with



apples' in those two sets of statistics, but I want to argue that Exhibit 1—my surveys with hundreds of managers, the experiences of senior executives in many organisations, and the ORC poll of 1.1 million employees—is at the very least a highly significant piece of circumstantial evidence.

#### Exhibit #2: the DTI and Professor Michael Porter

If you are a fan of BBC 2's *Newsnight* then you will know that there are times when Jeremy Paxman finds it hard to contain a contemptuous sneer for the intellectual inadequacies of the person sitting opposite him. When he interviewed Professor Michael Porter, sometime last year, Jeremy was clearly in awe of him. Porter is one of Harvard's intellectual giants, and he had been commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Economic and Social Research Council to investigate the current state of UK competitiveness.

Porter's report, whilst praising many areas of the UK economy, highlighted continued weaknesses in terms of skills, clusters of interconnected companies, and innovation. Porter stated, 'In terms of general labour force skills, the UK still falls behind competing economies. . .[and]. . .UK companies report significant skill shortages that are consistent with these deficits.'

Porter also turned his attention to the managerial workforce, and although praising much of what he saw, he made two telling points: 'UK companies adopt modern management techniques. . .later and less often than their competitors. . .[and]. . .they seem to achieve lower returns from implementing them,' and 'Problems with management skills in the UK seem likely to be concentrated at the lower and middle management level, reflecting the overall skill deficit in the UK labour force.'

Porter's view is supported by the 2002 Global Competitiveness Report that praised the UK for many areas of activity, but criticised the UK for 'skills deficits in the labour force despite favourable international rankings on educational achievement.'

#### Exhibit #3: Capitalising on talent

My third and final exhibit is a survey undertaken by OPP, the organisation formerly known as Oxford Psychological Press. OPP examined 400



UK companies and discovered, perhaps unsurprisingly, that 94% of companies believe that having talented employees has a positive effect on their profitability. They said, 'Company profits are inextricably linked to the quality of the organisation's employees.' What OPP researchers found was that 77% of these companies had no strategies in place either to recruit or to develop that talent. Can you believe it? To make things worse, 84% of the companies believed that they had substantial amounts of latent talent in their organisations that had not been discovered.

So, there you have just three brief exhibits of evidence: survey evidence about the neglect of talent; the work of the DTI and Michael Porter; and the OPP research. I assure you that I could keep you here for much longer developing those exhibits and other similar examples. Despite the rhetoric found in nearly all company annual reports about people being our most important assets, it seems that too many organisations have difficulty in appreciating the lesson learned by Andrew Carnegie, the great industrialist and philanthropist, who said a century ago, 'The only irreplaceable capital an organisation possesses is the knowledge and ability of its people. The productivity of that capital depends on how effectively people share their competence with those who can use it.'

Staying with my legal metaphor and my exhibits of evidence, I want to show that the organisations I have placed 'in the dock' must plead guilty to the charges brought against them. I contend that they would be hard pressed even to enter a plea that mitigating circumstances be taken into account. They are without excuse.

I have another three exhibits of evidence that will explain why organisations that have chosen to neglect investment in their most important assets are without excuse.

#### Exhibit #4: Accounting for people

The Department for Trade and Industry set up a task force, under the chairmanship of Denise Kingsmill, to look at the significance of human capital management. Denise is a Kiwi by birth and was raised in South Wales. She trained as an economist and anthropologist at Cambridge and



some years later became a barrister. She chairs various public bodies, is a non-executive director of a number of companies, a senior academic at Brunel, and until recently was the deputy chair of the Competition Commission. People such as the executive chairman of Cadbury Schweppes and the chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland joined her on her task force. In other words, she and her task force were big hitters.

Their starting point is best summed up with this quote from their Report (Department for Trade and Industry, 2003, 'Accounting for People', DTI website):

It has become commonplace for business leaders to observe that 'our people are our greatest asset'. The skills and commitment of an organisation's people play a central role in delivering many of the factors most frequently identified as critical to continuing survival and success. But people are not passive 'assets', to be managed like any other asset. The performance of an organisation depends upon the motivation and commitment of its people as well as upon their knowledge and skills.

The Kingsmill Report goes on to show that despite fine-sounding words, relatively few employers make a systematic attempt to assess their human capital (in terms of relevant knowledge, skills, experience and learning capacity), and to judge how well the organisation uses the talents of its people.

The findings of the task force are captured in Accounting for People, and the Report invites organisations to state in their Operating and Financial Reviews, and this applies to private and public sector organisations, what they have done to tackle business issues such as: the links between the organisation's approach to human capital management (HCM), its business strategy, and its performance; the link between workforce size and composition, and the organisation's performance; the organisation's approach to retention and motivation of its employees; the fit between skills and competencies, and the business needs of the organisation; how the organisation is using its remuneration and fair employment practices to support its business strategies; and the quality of leadership throughout the organisation and its



relationship to sustainability of performance and likelihood of successful implementation of strategy.

The Report demonstrates the link between effective people strategies and positive business performance, particularly through its use of case studies. It is clear that more and more successful UK companies are realising that investing in people makes sense and are ‘putting their money where their mouth is’ and investing substantially in their most important asset. The Kingsmill case studies alone should embarrass those organisations that try and claim ignorance—‘we didn’t know there was a link between people and performance’—as some form of defence.

Exhibit #5: Various Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports

The CIPD ([www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore)) commissioned a series of research reports to look at best practice in managing people. This is what three professors, highly respected for their expertise, had to say:

‘There is widespread evidence that the way a firm manages its employees influences organisational performance.’

‘Impressive results showing a clear association between the number of [effective] HR practices and profit or market value.’

‘Undoubtedly, however, the most successful organisations were those that could sustain their performance over the long term and demonstrate a robust association between people management and performance.’

—‘Understanding the People and Performance Link’

‘These results, based on the descriptions and judgements of a large group of senior managers in British industry, support the view that the effective use of a wide range of progressive HR practices is linked to superior performance.’

—‘Effective People Management’



‘[T]he economic conditions created by globalisation and the advent of new technologies have combined to make human capital and other intangible assets the major drivers of economic competitiveness.’

—‘Evaluating Human Capital’

Exhibit #6 *Harvard Business Review* articles

If you are a reader of the *Harvard Business Review*, then you will be familiar with articles showing the link between people strategy and business performance. I have only time for one such example.

In March 2004 Laurie Bassi and Daniel McMurrer, senior executives from a money management firm in Maryland, reported on research they had undertaken. Their full story is far too long to report, but the central finding of their research is fascinating. Their research reported that ‘treating employees like the assets they are—by investing in their development—boosts returns over the long term.’

Bassi and McMurrer created four hypothetical portfolios consisting of between 20 and 40 companies that invested at roughly twice the industry norm in employee development. They reported that their ‘returns were robust . . . [and showed] . . . that organisations that make extraordinary investments in people often enjoy extraordinary performance on a variety of indicators, including shareholder return.’

Bucked by their hypothetical success, they then created three live portfolios and discovered in 2003 that each of the three portfolios outperformed the market index significantly.

These are a few exhibits of evidence drawn from a welter of similar material to show that any organisation claiming not to know that investing in staff makes good business sense is, an organisation, to say the very least, that is not aware of what is taking place all around them.

I am grateful to Professor Hugh Coombes for sending me details of a recent publication from the Institute of Chartered Accountants for England and Wales entitled ‘Human Capital and Corporate Reputation.’ One of their contributors writes these words:



It is people who are now the key drivers of profitability. . .Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that people management and development are the drivers of distinction. . .The new challenge for leaders of organisations that are intent on maximising shareholder value (or in public sector terms, optimising best value) is to create human, social and intellectual capital in the organisation.

What should organisations do about it?

*If at first you don't succeed, blame someone else and seek counselling.*  
—Anon.

It would be quite understandable if, at this point in the lecture, I went into detail on the benefits of leadership development. Or if I spoke about various organisation development assignments I have undertaken for well-known clients, and the way in which we tackled the development of people. Well, I'm not going to. I said at the start of this lecture that I wanted to 'speak from the heart' and that is why I am going to talk about something called servant-leadership and the way in which it addresses the fundamental and underlying issues of what organisations should do to bring out the best in their people.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

The notion of the leader as servant was originally given prominence in the twentieth century through the writings of Robert Greenleaf. The central thesis of his writing was that 'caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built. . .[and] one way that some people serve is to lead.'

This became his inspiration and the driving force behind his belief that leadership should be based on the concept of the leader being *primus inter pares*—the first among equals, and this belief resulted in a series of challenging essays, speeches and articles that have stood the test of time. His essays



are not the easiest of reads; he was in many ways a philosopher and polemicist, but the following quotations from his work illustrate his ideas:

‘The great leader is seen as servant first.’

‘Do those served grow as persons? Do they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?’

‘Leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and competence and unless they have a sustaining spirit that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal.’

‘I am in the business of growing people—people who are stronger, healthier, more autonomous, more self-reliant, more competent.’

As you read through the various servant-leadership literatures, it is possible to present the key principles of servant-leadership as a set of characteristics. Larry Spears, CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, presented ten of these.

#### TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERVANT-LEADER

1. *Listening.* . . a deep commitment to listening intently to others. They seek to listen receptively to what is being said (and not being said!). Listening also involves getting in touch with one’s own inner voice. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.
2. *Empathy.* . . striving to understand and empathise with others. People need to be accepted and recognised for their special and unique spirits. One must assume the good intentions of co-workers and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject their behaviour or performance.
3. *Healing.* Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one’s self and others.
4. *Awareness.* General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Awareness aids in understanding issues involving ethics and values.





5. *Persuasion*. . .a reliance upon persuasion, rather than positional authority, in making decisions within an organisation. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups.
6. *Conceptualisation*. Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to 'dream great dreams.' The ability to look at a problem. . .from a conceptualising perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. . .a manager who wishes to be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking.
7. *Foresight*. The ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. . .Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant-leaders to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is deeply rooted within the intuitive mind.
8. *Stewardship*. 'Holding something in trust for another.' Robert Greenleaf's view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staffs, directors, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society.
9. *Commitment to the growth of people*. People have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, servant-leaders are deeply committed to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the institution.
10. *Building community*. Servant-leaders seek to identify a means for building community among those who work within a given institution.

I have to confess that the first time I read Robert Greenleaf's book, I thought it to be a rather sentimental work. The language of servant-leadership appeared to be out of kilter with the world of business and performance management. There is, however, a hard edge to the concept and Robert Greenleaf wrote, 'The servant as leader always empathises, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person's effort or performance as good enough.'

Some managers, when they hear the term servant-leadership, assume that managers should be working for their people, who would be deciding what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. If that is what servant-leader-



ship is all about, it doesn't sound to them like leadership at all. It sounds more like the inmates are running the prison.

Greenleaf and others recognised that in all organisations hard decisions have to be taken, and employees have to understand what they are expected to deliver. Servant-leadership does not contradict the basic rigours of business, but it does fundamentally influence the way in which business is conducted.

Adopting the characteristics of a servant-leader and applying them in the world of business is difficult, and I would not claim to have fully mastered the application of these characteristics. I am mindful that there are people here this evening whom I have managed in the past, and they will be aware that my principles and my practice have not always been congruous, and for that I apologise. However, I am more than prepared to express my belief in servant-leadership and to explain how I came to be committed to its principles. There are four main reasons that convinced me of its merits, and as I come to the final part of this lecture, and within minutes of your free glass of wine, I want to look at each of these four reasons, with something approaching indecent haste, and encourage you to think about some very important concepts.

The first reason I shall call the inspirational evidence. On my bookshelves are dozens of books by authors whose writings I admire greatly, people like Peter Senge, Warren Bennis, Arie De Geus, Max De Pree, and Rosabeth Moss Kanter. As I read their books, I noticed that time and again I would come across phrases such as these:

For many years I have told people that although there are a lot of books on leadership, there is only one that serious students have to read – *Servant-leadership* by Robert K. Greenleaf. . . few [other books] penetrate to deeper insights into the nature of real leadership. – Peter Senge

This is a wonderful book [referring to *Leadership is an Art* by Max DePree]. . . it says more about leadership. . . than many of the much longer books that have been published on the subject. – Peter Drucker



I could quote many other examples, but I hope these two quotations will illustrate my first argument. The writings of Robert Greenleaf and the concept of servant-leadership have impressed and had a profound effect on many of those people who in this generation are seen as leading authorities in their field.

On a personal level, I found the writings to be inspirational and I had to find out more.

My second reason is the business case. There is always a danger in using case studies as an example of a certain principle; Peters and Waterman found that out after they launched their seminal work, *In Search of Excellence!* No sooner had they extolled the virtues of particular companies than some of those very companies went into decline—terminal decline in certain instances (not that that had anything to do with Peters and Waterman, of course).

I have little first-hand experience of companies such as TDIndustries, Southwest Airlines, Synovus Financial Corporation, Herman Miller Inc., The Container Store, and the other oft-quoted U.S. examples of servant-leadership in action, but you would have to possess the head-in-the-sand qualities of an ostrich to ignore the evidence from these organisations. It is surely no coincidence that these companies prosper financially and score well in the Fortune 500 list of best companies to work for.

*If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit; no use being a damn fool about it.*

– W.C. Fields

Then there is the growing, but infant evidence from British-based companies. In a recent book, a fellow member of the Greenleaf Centre for Servant-Leadership shows that a significant number of those companies—companies such as Asda, Flight Centre, and Corgi—practice some form of servant-leadership, even if in many instances they do so without making a song and dance about it. They often avoid the jargon surrounding the concept, but clearly their management practices are directly



influenced, even governed by the principles of servant-leadership (Leary & Prosser, 2004).

It seems to me that to pay no attention to the various pieces of evidence runs the risk of committing a similar folly to that of our forefathers who ignored the total quality revolution occurring in the Far East until it was almost too late. The case studies show that the concept of servant-leadership is not some new idea, or passing fad, but something that has stood the test of time and something that has benefited both employees and organisations.

The moral case is my third reason. Throughout my working life, I have been appalled by the manner in which some managers have treated their employees. It seems that Henry Ford's alleged frustration, 'Why is it that whenever I ask for a pair of hands, a brain comes attached?' is alive and well in far too many companies. I remember my first experience of this abysmal treatment of people. When I started work in the manufacturing sector I met a man whom I shall call David Jackson. He worked, I learnt to my dismay, as a sweeper; he spent all day brushing up the mess left by other workers. Yet this man, a person I had known all my life, was a respected pillar of his community, someone whom people looked up to, someone who could be relied on for his wisdom and judgement, and someone who exercised valuable leadership within his church. But that company did not make use of David Jackson's qualities because their senior management believed that manual grades had little, if anything, to offer the organisation.

*If at first you don't succeed, try us.*

– Viagra advertisement

I know that servant-leadership is not a philanthropic movement established to liberate all and sundry from every menial task, but I do believe that we have a moral duty to treat people with respect; to make use of the potential within them; to develop their contribution; to see them as 'part-



ners' within the organisation; and to realise that serving their interests is consistent with serving the needs of the organisation.

I believe it to be little short of scandalous that 'talent may go unnoticed and unused', (DePree, 1989) and that, to quote the poet Thomas Gray even further:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Enough of my moral indignation!

My fourth and final reason is the evidence from human nature. During the past week, South Africa has been celebrating its tenth anniversary of independence and it seems particularly appropriate if I illustrate this final reason by quoting from Nelson Mandela's 1994 Inaugural Speech. He encouraged the people of South Africa to rise and claim their inheritance and this is a part of his speech:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and famous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.  
We were born to magnify the glory of God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

— Mandela, 1994 Inaugural Speech



I can think of no better way to encourage people across our country to show others the amazing talents that they possess.

People will constantly surprise you, and themselves, by what they are able to achieve if they are allowed to function in appropriate conditions. I could tell you story after story of people who appear to 'grow' before your very eyes when placed in the right environment. And what is true for individuals is also true for groups of people, and is also true for organisations as a whole.

As I work with people across this country, I often see a self-imposed reticence, a reluctance and hesitancy to realise and capitalise upon the amazing talents that lie within them. It may be that there are parts of our country, in particular, that suffer from such a lack of confidence.

#### CONCLUSION

What we need are leaders who are willing to stand up and become servants: servant-leaders. And people who are prepared to accept the leadership that is being offered to them. Are you up for it? Are you ready to lead? Are you willing to follow?

---

Stephen Prosser is Professor of Leadership and Organisation Development with the Department of Management in the Business School at the University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, South Wales. His book *Lessons in Learning and Leadership: The Story of the NHS Staff College* (2004), written with Professor Siobhan McClelland, examines a major feat of public sector organisational learning. He is the scholar representing Great Britain on the editorial board of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.



## REFERENCES

- Armstrong, G. *People practices make a difference*. Retrieved April 2004 from The Institute of Chartered Accountants' Human Capital and Corporate Reputation website: [www.icaew.co.uk](http://www.icaew.co.uk)
- Blanchard, K. (2002). Foreword: The heart of servant-leadership. In L. Spears & M. Lawrence (Eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant-leadership for the twenty-first century* (pp. ix-xii). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development. (n.d.). Effective people management. Available from [www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore).
- Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development. (2002). Evaluating human capital. Available from [www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore).
- Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development. (2003). Understanding the people and performance link. Available from [www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore).
- Department for Trade and Industry. (2003). Accounting for people. Available from <http://www.dti.gov.uk>.
- DePree, M. (1989). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Doubleday.
- Leary-Joyce, J. (1994). *Becoming an employer of choice*. London: CIPD publishing.
- Prosser, S., & McClelland, S. (2004). *Lessons in learning and leadership: The story of the NHS Staff College Wales*. Victoria, BC, Canada: Trafford Publishing.
- Prosser, S. (2003). *Development of a Welsh public service*. Cardiff, UK: Institute of Welsh Affairs.
- Stewart, T. (1997). *Intellectual capital*. London, UK: Nicholas Brealey Publishing Limited.
- Spears, L. (1997). *Insights on leadership*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

## NOTES

This lecture has been prepared with advice from the Plain English Campaign. They consider it to be 'an excellent example of how educational documents can be written with the audience in mind.'