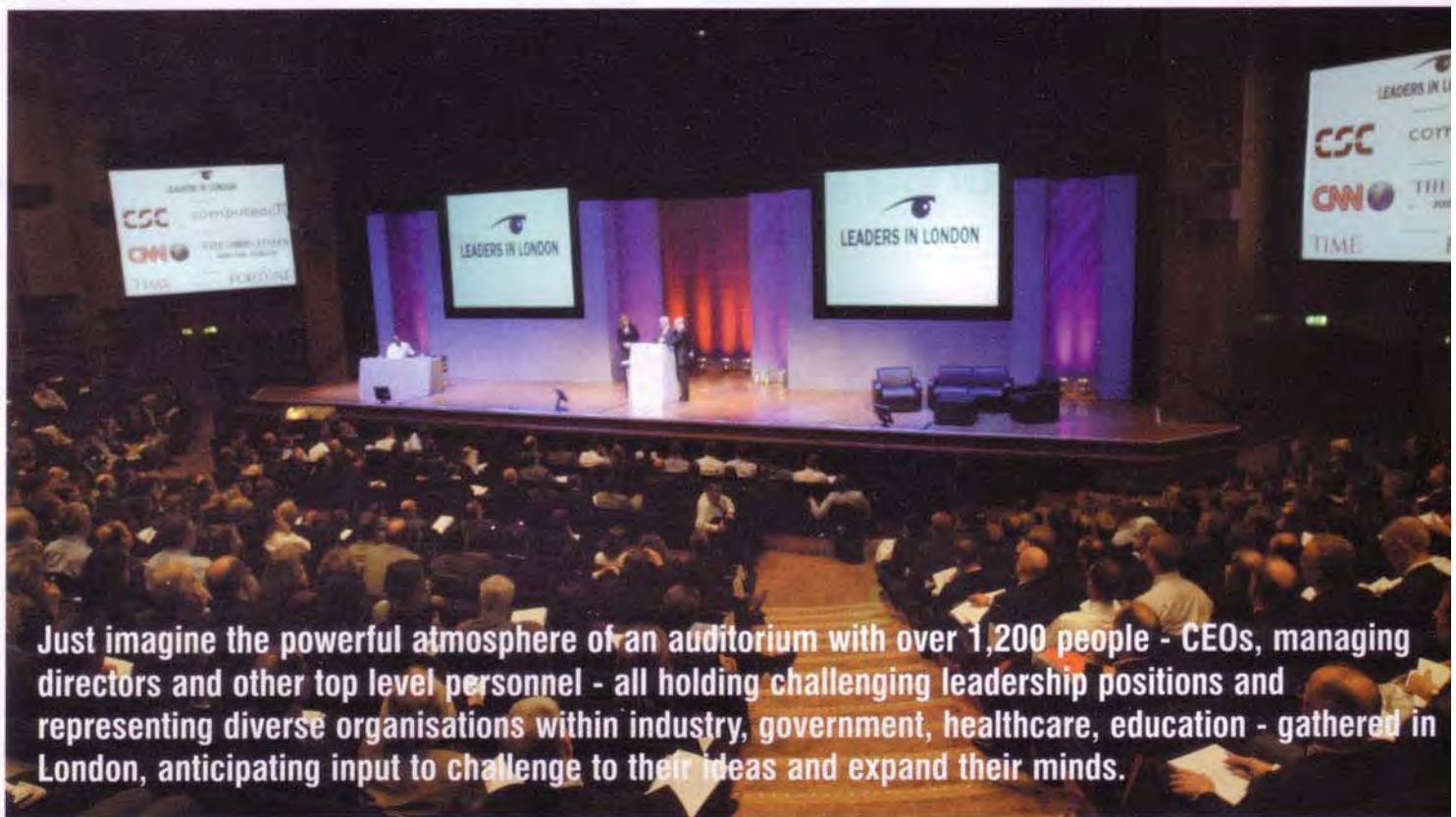


Ways to successful leadership



Just imagine the powerful atmosphere of an auditorium with over 1,200 people - CEOs, managing directors and other top level personnel - all holding challenging leadership positions and representing diverse organisations within industry, government, healthcare, education - gathered in London, anticipating input to challenge to their ideas and expand their minds.

The event – The second Leaders in London international summit.

by Christine Miller

The purpose – Exploring and defining leadership in the 21st century.

An impressive array of world-class leaders had been brought together, ensuring a compelling, broad-ranging and authoritative perspective, and the powerful pedigree of the speakers was indisputable. Last President of the Soviet Union and Nobel Peace Prize winner Mikhail Gorbachev opened the event. He was joined by Bill Clinton, 42nd President of the US; 3i Group PLC Chair Baroness Sarah Hogg; former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright; British Business leader Sir Terence Conran; explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, OBE; Michelle Mone, trailblazing entrepreneur and inventor of the Ultimo Bra; world-renowned 'Über-guru' and author Tom Peters; Royal Mail Chairman Allan Leighton and Dr Spencer Johnson, the world's most popular business author, who numbered amongst 17 inspiring figures imparting their ideas with passion during the two day conference which took place in October 2005 at the Barbican Centre. The event was hosted by leadership and business transformation expert René Carayol.

It was a rare privilege to hear the straight-talking Gorbachev point out the current leadership deficit in society, and support the idea that "leadership is an art that one can learn." He defined leadership qualities and skills as possessing instinct and analytical powers, sensing the waves before others, and accurately sensing the moment to act. He also offered this description of a leader: "A leader is a person who is brought forth by a specific situation and set of circumstances, who has the support and confidence to implement goals and visions."

Mr Gorbachev suggested that the United States of America right now needs its own Perestroika - a system offering freedom, social justice and social market economics, and described himself as a leader who stands for making people happy, and giving them the space and opportunity to realise their dreams.

Post Office Chairman Allan Leighton, scheduled to host a private luncheon which was re-organised because he was called to Downing Street for a select committee meeting, amused us greatly with his entertaining account of an email received from the event's management, saying that everything would be fine because "Gorbachev will step in for you" - as he said, a unique scenario and a document to treasure. His presentation emphasised inclusive leadership and had a clear strong message that "leadership is about doing things - not talking about them", stating that business is effective when it is 20 percent strategy and 80 percent execution - with a few good leaders who "do the right thing", and larger numbers of managers who "do things right". To quote host René Carayol: "Allan Leighton, in 15 minutes flat, had not just explained his mantra of "inclusive leadership", he had demonstrated it. He told us that 80 percent of his workforce were graded average. But average really meant good, so why were his people having to work hard and diligently and yet be made to feel average? He had the grade officially changed to good. I was amazed how much could be passed on in 15 high octane minutes. A leadership masterclass, no less.

I invited René's further reflections: "In the presence of greatness, the atmosphere in the auditorium at the Barbican was electric, it had been great throughout the day but the audience were still hungry as we waited for the former President of the US, Bill Clinton. He had some of the toughest leadership acts ever seen in Europe to follow.

The satellite link to Toronto kicked off. President Clinton's image lit up the Barbican and he stepped comfortably and smoothly into our world. His 40 minute speech passed in an instant. As I fielded questions from the audience and in turn questioned President Clinton a lone voice shouted out "any regrets?" Whilst trying to dress this rather sharp question a little more diplomatically, the President said "It's OK René, I heard the question".

Top leaders gather in London



He said "I have had some success, many disappointments; I have tasted failure and experienced public humiliation." At this moment, nearly all the heads in the auditorium (including my own) bowed, and looked away from his obvious pain. I have never before felt such a thing, and we all felt it together. Afterwards, everyone I spoke to felt he was talking to them personally. It was powerful stuff and nobody there will ever forget this remarkable human being.

It is not often one can say that you have interviewed Gorbachev, Albright and Clinton in the space of 48 hours and we were really in the presence of greatness."


I certainly agree with René that Bill Clinton was exceptional in his humanity and humility. His charismatic style came across unimpeded by the fact that this was a satellite transmission, and his forthright answers to the many questions endeared him further because he didn't flinch for a moment at their searching and personal nature.

Clinton spoke about the changing nature of our world, in that we are not private citizens any more, but collective citizens. He believes that leaders can be made by their aspiration to change, and that three key components are vision, strategy and will. When asked which leaders had most inspired him, Clinton cited Nelson Mandela and Yitzhak Rabin as "great friends and exceptional human beings", Martin Luther King as an inspiration from his southern childhood, and Billy Graham for his consistency in what he says and does, in being a humble and non-judgmental person.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes delighted with his humorous yet gritty account of the rigours of exploration, and the necessity of choosing one's team with extreme care. He pointed out that on an expedition faced with such extreme conditions, you don't want to have any rotten apples. If you're in Antarctica, and you have a problem team member, you may be able to sack them - but you can't get rid of them; so getting it right up front is of critical importance.

All the speakers fulfilled their roles with expected excellence, and the event

was highly informative. Two contrasting contributors were, firstly, Dr Spencer Johnson, a quiet, unassuming man who was reportedly making his first public appearance for seven years. He is the world famous author of "Who Moved My Cheese", the 21-million selling book about change, which has placed him as the number two best-selling author on Amazon, second only to J.K. Rowling. The story was written over 20 years ago during a difficult time of personal change for him, addressing the key question "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" It was only when a colleague urged Spencer Johnson to go public, because the story would be such a service to many people struggling with fear of moving on, that he decided to publish. Secondly, the inspirational Michelle Mone, dynamic owner and founder of MJM International, inventor of the 'Ultimo' bra, whose challenging early life in Glasgow has left her with the determination and guts to overcome whatever life may throw in her path. Her story is a lesson in commitment, persistence and belief, and the possibilities of overcoming the odds and leading the way to success whilst maintaining strong family values.

Bill Clinton spoke powerfully of overcoming setbacks in pursuit of dreams, and how it is more disappointing to look back on inaction, on the failure to try, than it is to have failed. He said "I would rather have done all that I've done, and endured defeats, rather than not doing it. We have to pay the price." Clinton defines himself as a leader who stands for hope - in the current climate, perhaps leaders can adopt his optimism, and that which the whole Leaders in London event represented, and work towards a positive and inclusive future for the world of business and society as a whole. 

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