

When Harry met George (in New Delhi)

by Richard Olivier

Ever since I received the invitation to speak at the Hindustan Times annual Leadership Summit in New Delhi, I had been excited and perplexed in almost equal measure. Excited, because the work Olivier Mythodrama is doing in India has revealed fascinating challenges in its time of unprecedented economic growth - and here was an opportunity to feedback our reflections to a high-powered audience. Perplexed, because the lead guest speaker at the event was to be none other than George W Bush, the 43rd President of the United States of America - a leader my colleagues and I do not particularly admire.

My good friend, the wise poet - philosopher David Whyte, had advised me to be myself yet retain the right to "*respectfully disagree with everything the previous speaker has said*". He had used this strategy to good effect when following Dick Cheney at a conference in Mexico a couple of years previously.

But my confusion was compounded when several Indian friends and clients assured me that George Bush was well respected in India, not least because of his support for their nuclear industry and knowledge

sharing across borders. I arrived in New Delhi with Tim Cox, our Business Development Manager, to see Dr Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, open the conference, referring to George Bush as "a great friend of India" in his first opening sentences. (For insights into Dr Singh and other speakers reflections on "Vision 2020 - challenges for the next decade" please see Tim Cox's article; **The Roving Report**. My dilemma was now at least clearer; How could I be honest about the leadership principles I believe in and yet not implicitly offend my hosts in their choice of principle guest?

The first glimmer of a solution arrived much later that day - courtesy of the Gala dinner. Along with 300 or so invited guests we were to be wined and dined in the sumptuously decorated gardens of the Taj Hotel. At a certain point the number of burly white blokes with darting, cold eyes, bulging jackets and serious earpieces surged considerably. 'Elvis' was in the building, As the crowd parted to allow the ex-most powerful man in the world to walk slowly towards his table with his hosts, the CEO of a financial services company standing next to me turned and said softly: "*Ah, discredited Western leaders - always treated like Kings,*

aren't they?". Which brought solace on two fronts; not everyone, apparently, was an uncritical fan of "Dubya"; and a famous line from Hamlet flashed into my mind;

"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King"

I turned this thought over in my mind until the penny dropped; it was not my place to be overtly critical of the main guest, but nor did I have to hide my concerns about the unsustainable impact of immature leaders. I had been invited to share insights into "*Inspirational leadership - lessons from Henry V*". If I told the story the right way, I could subtly highlight the contrasts between his way of leading and the previous speaker's. It was not about bashing George, but letting Henry speak.

To be fair George Bush did a good job with his audience the next morning. He warmed them up with a couple of self-deprecating jokes about coming out of office; "*I went to a hardware store and the owner told me, 'Does anyone ever tell you that you look like George W. Bush?' I said, 'I get that a lot.' He replied, 'God, you must hate that.'"* And: "*You're lucky you're not paying me by the word; giving talks like these is*

what my Dad calls 'White Collar crime'."

He praised the good relationship between the US and India (and took a fair amount of credit for it), he talked about the financial crisis; "*Wall Street got drunk, we got the hangover*", defended the US giving aid to Pakistan; "*Wouldn't you rather have a friend who can talk to a neighbour when there is tension?*"; remained steadfastly unrepentant about Iraq and unashamedly for spreading western style democracy across the world despite cultural difference. "*In the long-term, the way to fight terrorists is to tackle their ideology and for that we need to advance our values of democracy.*"

He received spontaneous applause when suggesting that India could be invited onto the UN Security Council, but hinted other members had resisted diluting power at the Top 5 table. He became defensive under questioning, at one point claiming rather grandly "*Everyone in the world believed he (Sadam Hussein) had WMDs.*" (Actually, this is not true; I and my colleagues were working with the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2002-3, and their weapons inspectors were not sure. They wanted more time to prove it one way or the other - and this they were not allowed to have.)

He finished by claiming he was late for his plane and left rather swiftly. The most poignant moment for me was when he was asked what he would recommend Obama to do about the economy and he said in a rather strained voice; "*Look, I'm not 'the Guy' anymore*". It was a strange choice of metaphor for the most powerful position on the planet. Still, if you live in England not being 'the Guy' can have its advantages, especially around Bonfire Night (November 5th).

Both the "King" and his conscience were well gone by the time I stood up to speak and I started with our key leadership reflection; India has developed incredible expertise in financial management of rapid economic growth, but now had an opportunity to develop more sustainable and inspired leadership, for the long term good of all. The story I would tell held some eternal Shakespearean wisdom as to what this might look like.

Having thought closely about the contrasts I now perceived between Henry V and George W, I decided to highlight the areas of the story where these seemed most obvious. For the reader's sake I will include the contrast alongside Henry's story. (For an article containing further insights in to the story of Henry V, please read: '**Rehearsing Tomorrow's Leaders**' by Richard Olivier & Dr Julie Verity, and for details of the Henry V programme please visit [our website](#).)

At the beginning of our case study Henry, as a young man then known as Prince Harry, has to leave his dodgy reputation as a heavy drinker and layabout Prince in order to step into the throne room and earn respect. (Something George would presumably have sympathy with after a few well documented youthful exuberances of his own?)

Those around Henry believe he has experienced a transformational moment in the wake of his father's death:

"The breath no sooner left his father's body, But that his wildness, mortified in him, Seem'd to die too; yea, at that very moment, Consideration, like an angel, came And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him, Leaving his body as a paradise, To envelop and contain celestial spirits."

The idea here is that inspired leaders move beyond the human temptation to serve themselves and their close friends and genuinely seek to serve the spirit of the times. If there was a unique reason for you - as a unique individual - to be in your position of leadership at this precise moment in history, what might it be?

I couldn't help remembering a Bush quote I had seen reprinted after a fundraising dinner; "*This is an impressive crowd -- the haves and the have mores. Some people call you the elite -- I call you my base.*" *It is clear that leaders need to court support from the well heeled yet Bush is often accused of serving only a hawkish few; was he really representing the true spirit of the time?*

We argue that every leader (indeed every human) will have several opportunities to "wake up" to a bigger purpose than themselves – and those who take these seriously are those most likely to leave the world a better place. Ghandhi had a "road to Damascus" moment when he was thrown out of a first class carriage in South Africa in 1893, Mikhail Gorbachev had his while flying over Washington and realising the briefcase that his companion was holding held the nuclear codes to blow up the beautiful country beneath him.

Henry heeds his wake up call to service and purposeful leadership and actually distances himself from various old friends who might tarnish his reputation. This earns him the beginning of trust from his key stakeholders. Now he has to convince them to follow him into a difficult project – reclaiming the lost territory of France. Here there is a strange echo – George Bush Senior handing Saddam and Iraq to George Junior as unfinished business and Henry IV

handing France to Henry V with the all too often repeated advice; *"Busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels."*

Henry spends a lot of time listening to different opinions about whether he has the "Right" to go to France or not. No matter how appealing, if it is not manifestly the morally right thing to do - not just for England but for France too - then he will not go. He tasks his 'moral compass consultant', the Archbishop of Canterbury, in no uncertain terms, to tell him the real truth, without spin:

"God forbid, my dear and faithful lord, That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading, Or nicely charge your understanding soul, With opening titles miscreate, whose right Suits not in native colours with the truth; For God doth know how many now in health, Shall drop their blood in approbation, Of what your reverence shall incite us to. Therefore take heed how you impawn our person, How you awake our sleeping sword of war: We charge you, in the name of God, take heed;"

This is a pretty clear instruction not to "sex up" your documents for war. My friend the actor Mark Rylance did extensive research into the life and work of David Kelly (the weapons inspector who apparently committed suicide) for his BAFTA winning performance in *"A Weapons Inspector Calls"*. He is very clear that Kelly and others were put under relentless pressure to confirm the WMD story without conclusive proof - in other words leaders taking their people to war on a false premise. Bush followed Blair's lead claiming in his State of the Union Address, 2003; *"The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."* The US media now report as a fact that Administration officials knew at the time that this was false.

Enticing as it seems up front to do "whatever it takes" to get buy-in, if you enter a difficult struggle on a false premise, how on earth are you going to re-motivate your people when things get really tough? Both Obama and Brown are suffering Iraqi size hangovers from the GB/TB party.

Having built genuine consent around the French project Henry gets the go ahead and prepares not only for the battle ahead, but also for a bigger vision - France and England at peace and in harmony. His motivation is not for a quick win but for long term stability.

When Henry gets behind schedule to take his first foothold (the town of Harfleur) he paints such a successful negative picture of the future for the Governor of Harfleur, particularly focusing on the likely damage to his people, that the Governor gives up the town without further fighting. Henry promises that all the people will be safe. He says to his generals:

"When lenity (lenience) and cruelty play for a kingdom, The gentler gamester is the soonest winner"

In the bigger picture the citizens of Harfleur are also "his people" - if France and England are re-united, these are fellow citizens - so why would he want them hurt? At this point images from Abu Graihb prison flashed through my mind. A responsible leader has to take responsibility for the tone they set for actions of those under their command. When Henry finds out that one of his old friends from the pub has broken discipline by stealing a cross from a Harfleur church, he does not protect him "for old times' sake" but stands by while the man is hanged. You cannot pretend to be fighting on behalf of a people if you don't offer them human respect and decency.

Later still, when faced with the true difficulty of his mission, Henry V goes through a classic "dark night of the soul" experience. The French have mustered a huge force that outnumbers his by five to one, and tell him if he does not give up, all his people will be slaughtered. This is the kind of dilemma that forces the best leaders to ask themselves some tough questions: *"am I still doing the right thing?"*, *"am I still the right person to do it?"*, *"do I have the right to ask my people to continue making a sacrifice for this?"*

Depth psychologists tell us that this capacity to doubt is natural, human and necessary. In fact, the only people who "have no doubt" have been proven to be psychopathic or tyrants. David Whyte talks compellingly about "robust vulnerability" - when people are seen to be stronger after they appropriately reveal their inner difficulties and struggles. Of, course, in the modern world we know how difficult it is for a politician to say "sorry", mean it, and survive in post. Sadly, one indictment of our current times, is that they are much more likely to survive if they court "deniability" and find a fall guy further down the line. In an informal conversation with one ex Director of the CIA I was told; *"I know that part of my job is to fall on my sword for the boss when it becomes necessary"*. He did. To date George W Bush is steadfastly unrepentant for instigating a campaign in Iraq that conservative estimates say has cost the lives of 100,000 innocent Iraqi citizens - and has admitted not a single moment of doubt.

After an almost miraculous victory at the battle of Agincourt the natural tendency of English troops is to deify Henry's leadership, but he remains humble, insisting that they take no credit away from themselves or from

God - in other words "we won because we were doing the right thing - and because of you, not me". Jim Collins in his best selling book "Good to Great" refers to this as "level 5 leadership" - to have great force of will balanced with deep humility. George may be humble about his linguistic ability – he listed one of his two biggest regrets of his presidency as "use of language" - but not about his decisions, which in the scheme of things were probably more important.

Finally, the test of a leader will be his legacy. How do people reflect on him after his time - were the changes he stood for seen to be for the greater good and generally worthwhile? In Henry's case, it is clear that his intention is to "turn the battlefield into a garden". He is willing to compromise his original vision ("France and England united by Christmas") in order to negotiate a potentially lasting peace; Henry agrees to marry Katherine, Princess of France, is made legal heir and will inherit the French kingdom on her father's death.

However, he is also faced with a final challenge; it took his warrior nature to get him into the war, but that part of him will not win the "garden" he aspires to. In New Delhi George was asked some tough questions as to why he and his advisors had not thought the post-war scenario in Iraq through well enough. His earnest reply; *"We thought about it a lot!"* The trouble is that thinking about it with an old mindset is unlikely to help. As Einstein said; *"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."* If we truly want to turn the battlefield in to a garden it seems we have to be prepared to think in a different way. In the last scene of Henry's story he attempts to solve his next problem (how to get Princess Katherine to fall

in love with him) with his old warrior style – but he is self-aware enough to notice that this is not working, and courageous enough, to say so:

"Now, curse my father's ambition! he was thinking of civil wars when he got me: therefore was I created with a stubborn outside, with an aspect of iron, that, when I come to woo ladies, I fright them."

The old ways of doing things, the ways he inherited from the previous generation, and specifically from his father, will not work to change the energy in the present. His "Aspect of Iron" - the 'armour' he has learnt to wear so well as a warrior leader - will not win the peace.

So once again, Henry's identity is at stake; is he going to be defined by habit, by his now habitual way of being; the aggressive warrior? Or is he big enough, wise enough to "grow" once more - just as he did when he stepped out of being the layabout Prince to become the responsible King? This is the kind of transformation that Nelson Mandela went through - from wanted terrorist to father of the new Rainbow Nation of South Africa. It was a transition that Winston Churchill found very difficult; he won the war but found it difficult to manage the peace.

Bush in Delhi, according to the Hindustan Times reporter present; *"was unapologetic about the decisions he made to wage the "war on terrorism." He made it clear that when it came to terrorists, he saw no point in compromise. "I don't think you can negotiate with them."*

Though this was what F W de Klerk did with Nelson Mandela and the ANC, and what Tony Blair helped to achieve in Northern Ireland. Obama has set out his stall in this way too, saying at his inauguration; *"we will hold out our hand if you will*

unclench your fist". Time will tell if the offer is accepted, and if both sides can agree on a "garden" that both are willing to compromise to achieve.

Henry's willingness to transform himself is a foundation of truly inspired leadership. As he recognises that his old ways will not achieve the peaceful garden he yearns for he commits himself to another learning challenge. He will take 3 months off from siege warfare and come to meet Katherine every day in a garden to grow their relationship. On this basis the marriage is agreed and peace achieved. And so the story ends.

In New Delhi there were less people in the room for Harry than there were for George (and less for George than there was for the Indian film stars Kareena Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan) but Henry's wisdom was well received. Among the many engaging conversations after the session, one CEO came up and said; *"Well, if it came down to a choice between Henry or George Bush, I'd vote for your guy!"* Some people, it seemed, had got the message.

Leading under pressure is undoubtedly one of the harder tasks on the planet right now and it is all too easy to knock those who try and fail. But there is enough wisdom out there, distilled from remarkable thinkers through the ages, that we can at least hope that those who put themselves forward as leaders in this crucial time, take advantage of what is available. Shakespeare, to my mind, is one hell of a leadership consultant. If I didn't know better, I'd be tempted to call him "the guy"!