

Meeting Minutes

Time: Saturday 11.09.21, 11 am ET, ClubHouse

Guest speaker: [Benjamin Beckhart](#) invited by [cristina brodu](#)

OPMs: [Volodymyr \(Vol\) Berezniy](#), [Dao Jensen](#), [Prahlad Advani](#), [Arshi Tayyab](#), [Ezi Rapaport](#), [Yvette Owo](#), [Shane Tragethon](#), [Denrich Sananda Rebecca Taylor](#), [Vini Kaul](#), [Ricardo De La Fuente](#)
Secretary (not OPM): [cristina brodu](#)

Topic: HBS OPM ClubHouse 17th Meeting: [“LEAD WITH CHARACTER” w/ B. BECKHART](#)
(Next meeting: 18.09.21, 11 am ET. Topic: [“HOW TO STAY RELEVANT IN YOUR INDUSTRY”](#))

- Ben after his HBS MBA had the choice to work in Wall Street but decided to go for a more difficult path: joining companies to learn how to best lead people. In one of his HBS MBA class discussions everyone had agreed leaders are not born but made, so he realised that to lead - guiding and inspiring people to move in a certain direction - one learns by doing. He went through leadership development programs too, which focused on competencies - e.g. setting an agenda, strategic thinking, effective communication, working in a team and across boundaries, being a team player, developing people - and he thought this wasn't enough. So he started to look at the people he admired in his own family, community and history, to see what made a difference. He noticed they nurtured traits we're all born with, but that we repress culturally or institutionally: they all led high performance by being engaging, compassionate, humble. Wanting to learn from them, he started to assess his first role as MD against these traits: if sometimes he missed compassion or humility, he addressed it (eg. if hadn't all answers, he had the humility to involve others to find them: none of us is born knowing, we must ask questions)
- Some baby boomers are not well leading millennials as they fail to recognise they're strong critical thinkers who have to be driven by purpose. So one must assess: what impact do I want to have? Is it to raise and liberate the human spirit (positive impact), or to repress it (negative)? Make a difference
- We are all leaders because people hear our words and see what we do [we lead by example]. But people imitate even more the leaders who reached success (eg: having authority, political influence, money) thinking they have to be like them to share in their power, fame and wealth: so if their example is negative, it has replication ripple effects. But leaders as Madela - selfless, who put the interest of others before themselves - truly embrace Character Leader traits and have a positive impact, vs who leads by causing fear, having damaging impact: eg politicians 'fear leaders' usually cause emmigration
- Character Leaders acknowledge potential in all human beings, know what makes them different, can incorporate it. If you are compassionate, you walk in their shoes, as caring is another trait of Character Leaders: it means taking the time to talk with the people who are diverse, as if you integrate them, you get a lot of points of view. Having an international group makes it very inclusive, as no one likes to be "from somewhere else". Bringing in the best person to the job does not have to do with functionality, but with whether the person believes in your vision, is aligned to your purpose, to win their heart. To create "togetherness" you have to create bonds, "break bread" with diverse people [a term used to express a sign of hospitality, communion and friendship, such as sharing a meal], ask questions with trust, respect and dignity (in reply to Ezi's Q on staff diversity and its impacts on creativity, innovation)
- Mentor and mentee relationships work when you have the former more senior than the later, and it is key they're in cross functional areas, with the boss not being the mentor of a subordinate. They have to commit to get out of their comfort zone and create a space of trust, dignity, respect. Generally mentees are more tech savvy: reverse mentoring is not about that, but asking questions as: "what frustrates you in the organization?" Many mentees wish to share ideas but aren't listened to (in reply to Yvonne's Q re diverse mentoring and how to address her challenges with her staff who not feels psychologically safe)
- Leadership is a quest: most of us starting in positions of authority have less time for people, and that's poor emotional intelligence [EQ], as much as 'cutting people off', not asking questions. So first be self aware. Practice asking questions, eg. "share with me what obstacles you're running into or haven't been able to resolve". Open door policy is high EQ (in reply to Shane re emotional intelligence)

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- To inspire to support your project and align to your vision and purpose: 1. share, 2. care, 3. aid (help) Running a company we know our vision and strategy, but we forget to continually share it, tell others “this is our ambition, our strategy” in everyday work conversation, to make all people part of the puzzle
- Leaders need to be aware of what goes on around them, and need to share with their people the bad news too (also financials), to prepare them: the younger generation wants information, as they need it to make a difference. Take also the time to show how the company systems work, and share why the strategy is how it is: you'll win people over. (In reply to Denrich, re internal and external awareness)
- Rewarding is very important. In his first job, Ben had a boss who told him he was there to tell him what he did wrong, not what was right (which was what he was paid for). Gossip is negative: but if you use it to talk about little wins, you can make it possible. Reward people by acknowledging their value. The US litigiousness fosters a mistrust culture: you can create trust by sharing, caring and rewarding.
- All leaders (as the OPMs) can make a difference with nurturing Character Leader traits and high EQ, aspects that Ben saw in all entrepreneurs at <https://endeavor.org>, a NY accelerator for startups where he was a mentor (in reply to Stephen's Q on who are under-50 leaders with high EQ leadership style)
- At Harvard half grade is participation: introverts had to go out of their comfort zone, talking in class. Ben's daughter is an entrepreneur and had the courage to also include those who were not like her, because as a character leader she wants to grow together with those around her, including who needs an opportunity to share ideas (in reply to Vini's Q on how to include who doesn't talk at her meetings)
- Selfish leaders are masters of deception. The advice to continue growing as Character Leaders is to not worry about the deceivers, but focus on one's own contribution, high performance, making sure subordinates become high performers too, because if you radiate nurturing traits you transmit them. Dishonest people are skillful at manipulating and deceiving, but soon or later they are discovered, fall (in reply to Cristina's Q about leaders who “fake it until they make it” as their dishonesty confuses her)
- The easiest way to delegate is to find out what a person wants to learn, what is passionate about and good at, and then delegate (in reply to Natalia's question on how a Character Leader delegates)

Additional insights from Benjamin Beckhart (from a pre-meeting written conversation)

- Humanity will live through times of Character Leaders and others of Fear Leaders (like now). The latter is related to a Manichean philosophy whereby there is a constant struggle between good and evil. I promote that we have the inner capability to nurture and practice Character Leadership as opposed to Fear Leadership (such as that of Hitler, Stalin, Trump and currently of Bolsonaro, Bezos)
- A younger, low experience, less educated fear leader has a lot of insecurities, or psychological complexes. My thesis is that fear leaders have insecurities, and develop “survival” skills including and not limited to manipulation, deception, harassment, managing upwards deceptively, intimidation, etc.
- Fear Leaders reach the top through their tactics, which they believe have enabled their growth. Thus, they see no need to change. Even worse, Fear Leaders lose their self awareness, interest in feedback, and drive for self growth. A change in a Fear Leader may come about if they experience a major breakdown as the loss of a loved one. This experience may provoke reflection and self renewal action
- There has been a time in my life when I tried to emulate a fear leader to be respected in a business environment that rewarded his behaviour, but I wasn't myself, so I didn't continue to emulate: asking feedback to my subordinates I become a Character Leader (more compassion, humility, engagement)
- Organizations must practice character leadership from the top to the bottom. If character leadership is genuine, fear leaders will be detected and expelled: fear leaders exist because they are allowed to
- Character Leaders prevail in an organization with values: because of their outstanding performance, exemplary character traits and congruence. Character Leadership, like life, is a long distance run