

Good leaders have 'air' about them

Inclusion style applies insight, innovation, willingness to learn to drive results

What makes a great leader? That's a tough question to answer. Not everyone is equipped to be a good leader and not all good leaders use the same style. The best leaders have insight, imagination, a willingness to learn on the job and enough flexibility to make course corrections.

There are four leadership styles that mesh nicely with the four elements — earth, water, fire and air.

Earth leadership style: Baby boomers, raised in the *Leave it to Beaver* world of the 1940s and 1950s, understood, trusted and felt secure within a hierarchical system respecting the police, teachers, parents and, certainly, the vice-principal — known for discipline.

The leadership style was like the element of earth — solid, grounded, concrete, stable and designed to maintain the status quo — generating little dynamism and change.

Water leadership style: The 1960s and 1970s brought flower children, Maggie Trudeau and the Rolling Stones. The world moved from earth to water, which created instability as people explored who they were. The water element style was expressed by Pierre Trudeau pirouetting behind the Queen and his famous "Just watch me" phrase. People tested the waters through "whole person" workshops and alternative lifestyles.

Fire leadership style: With the 1980s, 1990s and the new millennium came the fire element leadership style, which heated things up as people

■ GUEST COMMENTARY

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went from "How do we feel" to "Get out of my way." People thought the rules didn't apply to them, as they ran traffic lights in their need to be the first and the fastest.

They became egocentric and the principle of "I" as opposed to the previous "me" generation took over. Nobody cared about how greed impacted the rest of the world, they just consumed.

Air leadership style: As we enter the second decade of the 2000s, we see the air leadership style personified by United States President Barack Obama — applying a vision of interdependency while dialoguing, listening and responding to the world's tensions.

So which leadership style is best suited for the current economic climate?

Although an earth status quo style ensures the economic system is stable, there is little dynamism and the conservation of resources drives decisions. In this style, we don't question the system because we are dependent on it for our survival and safety.

The water style allows for freedom of expression, recognition of feelings, is all-inclusive and always changing. Resources are explored, connected, used and replenished, though not always efficiently. We are still dependent on the economic system but we

question it and point out its faults as we learn we can't throw the whole system out just because it isn't perfect.

The fire style is forceful and driven by those who are the most powerful as they use resources in any way that suits them. Paying little attention to replenishing those resources, fire uses the marketplace for personal gains. Here we move into independent behaviours with little regard for the whole economic system.

The air style understands when one part of the economic system is affected, the whole system is affected. Interdependency is recognized and the good use of resources is required to have a sustainable future. It is inclusive, future-oriented and strives for high standards of operating, applying both insight and imagination.

No longer using earth's status quo, water's touchy-feely or fire's shooting-from-the-hip styles, leaders must provide intelligent, creative ways to drive the economy while creating a sustainable future.

Good leaders must have the courage to admit when they are heading off course and the strength to keep their hands on the wheel while making course corrections as required.

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