



### **Is It Possible To Lead From The Shadows?**

Many people see a leader as someone who is always front and centre, comfortable with the glare of the spotlight and able to handle the accompanying expectation. They have to perform, they have to set an example, and they have to inspire people to follow them.

You can't be inspired unless someone is leading from the front, can you?

Well, in my many years of recruiting leaders for various businesses, I can say that inspiring others isn't always about leaders leading from the front. On reflection, many leaders are often nowhere near the front.

The key requirement of any leader is that they understand the nature of those around them.

If someone is "on stage" all the time, it isn't so easy to quietly sit down with Joanne and talk through her challenges. If someone is used to every command being slavishly obeyed, it won't be so easy to handle the occasional dissent from a more knowledgeable team member – backing down is a sign of weakness, surely? If someone is too used to the sound of their own voice, they tend to ignore the value of the voice in others.

Leading from the stage can make it harder to remain close to your people. Leading from the shadows (behind the scenes) may allow a leader to perhaps appreciate the subtlety of how their team operates. You can lose your sense of perspective when a bright light is shining on you - looking out from the shadows, things can often seem a little clearer.



Stonewater Consulting Group Pty Ltd  
Level 25, Aurora Place  
88 Phillip Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Australia  
ABN: 82 123 880 713  
T: +61 (0)2 8211 0565  
[www.stonewater.com.au](http://www.stonewater.com.au)

This requires a decent dose of humility.

I have written before about the importance of being humble when you are entrusted with a position of leadership. Your mission should be centred around your team, and if you are able to forget about your personal agenda and embrace the individual agendas of others, you will create a far more cohesive and powerful unit than if you simply seek to get everyone to listen to your voice. Valuing the opinions of others over your own is a true test of a leader, but you can't value someone's opinion unless you know what it is.

You don't get to know the opinions of others when you are constantly up on stage.

Leaders "pulling together" with their teams will always play an important part, but from my experience of recruiting leaders, the value comes not because the team sees that their leader is making the same effort as them. The true value comes from the leader understanding what it is to be a member of the team.

Working this out from the shadows is far easier than in the glare of the spotlight.

There is always a time and a place for a leader to step up and set an example. When times are tough, this is especially important. Having said that, possessing the ability to rein in their views to allow the team to provide solutions to their own problems will always be an important quality.

With over 20 years' global expertise in Human Capital, Faz Fazal is the Managing Director of Stonewater Consulting Group (SCG). SCG is one of Australia's leading specialist providers of Human Capital Advisory services. Visit our website at [www.stonewater.com.au](http://www.stonewater.com.au)