

YOUR INTENTION CREATES THE IMPACT YOU HAVE BY BARBARA WILBY

Recently I did a weekend course called Truth and Choices on Screen. I had a hunch that the course might be useful for my work in coaching and facilitation. I walked into a room on a Friday night with eight others and a camera. My fellow students were mostly young hopefuls, some professional actors, all wanting to improve their on-screen skills.

Over the weekend I learned a few things. One is that I am really bad at memorizing scripts! The acting profession is better without me. One of the other I reflected on is the relationship between acting and intention. I learned that the impact on the audience of the person on-screen is a lot to do with the quality of their intention. For example, what the actor intends to communicate, who the actor intends to be in a role, how present they are in the moment. It sounds simple, but is it? What is this thing called intention? It's an often-used word, but how often do leaders incorporate it into their leadership?

We can think of intention as what is involved in making an idea materialise into something that is tangible. Intention is the fuel that makes you move in your chosen direction. As such, intention is one of the foundation stones of leadership. This is because your leadership proceeds out of your intentions as a leader. To follow the acting analogy a bit further, the quality of your leadership proceeds from the quality of your intentions. If you are not achieving the results you want as a leader, ask yourself about the quality and character of your intentions.

The importance of this was illustrated recently in a coaching situation that I encountered. I was coaching a member of a management team, a classic perfectionist, and a very successful one. The success had a price. He worked enormous hours to control every detail and was very critical of those around him. He was also very hard on himself. Every time he and the team achieved something, even a major milestone, he would simply lift the bar higher, without stopping to celebrate the achievement. His perfectionistic intentions had become an unconscious pattern in his leadership.

As soon as he became conscious of this, he had a choice. Would he continue with the perfectionistic behaviours, or adopt a new set of behaviours? To transform his behavioural pattern, it was necessary to look at the intention behind the behaviour. He chose to do this.

The intention that produced the perfectionistic behaviour was one of seeing an imperfect world that he had to fix, a half-empty glass. His new intention was about a half-full glass: a focus on the possibilities and potential for people, rather than automatically looking at what was wrong. This intention is producing dramatically different results in his team. The objective measurement of behaviour through a 360 feedback instrument shows marked differences in the way his behaviour is perceived.

What intentions do you have as a leader?