

Horatio Nelson- Creating a Band of Brothers

(extract from "Winning leadership: a Viking With a Mother's Heart". Whitepaper available from www.davidparmenter.com)

By David Parmenter

In Trafalgar Square, amongst the pigeons stands a large monument to Lord Nelson. It is said that much of the funds to build the 170 foot high monument came from sailors who survived the many torrid battles Nelson masterminded.

I would like to explore Nelson's achievements through a model of winning leadership. This model looks at leadership from two perspectives. What foundations stones need to be in place in order to lead? As Jack Welch would say "the tickets to the game". And secondly, what are the traits that a leader needs to master in order to be effective?



This article attempts to pull together much that has been written about Nelson in a way that it can be digested and embedded in daily routines. The full leadership story is best told in a must read book called 'Nelson's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Commander by Jonathan Gosling and Stephanie Jones'.

I will also point out in this paper that a leader, once they have their foundation stones in place, and are able to juggle the winning leadership traits that will create the culture required to succeed. I call this culture "a band of brothers" and its influence is indicated in the diagram with a "B". This phrase **band of brothers** first came to light in Shakespeare's Henry V play.

*"This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered,
We few, we happy few,
We **band of brothers**.
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother."*

Nelson went to great lengths to build his band of brothers. The loyalty they shared for Nelson and each other ensured a fighting force that had no equal. The frequent dining together, sharing fine wines and food ensured a tight knit group who saw each other as brothers rather than fellow officers.

Nelson's Leadership Foundation Stones

Minimise personal baggage

Nelson appeared very aware of the dangers of past experiences colouring ones behaviour. Whilst he did not have the tools that are now available to current leaders to understand better his own personal baggage he did maintain an active counsel with his band of brothers who kept him largely on the straight and narrow.

Love thy neighbour as thyself

Winning leaders need to show that they have integrity, honesty and love of the common man. Nelson demonstrates this many times, for example on capturing a Spanish ship he returned the troops to Spain unhurt. After battles he would rescue as many of the foreign sailors as possible.

He remembered sailors' names and once stopped a carriage to shake the hand of Tom Cleaves who had played his pipe whistle among a large crowd. Nelson not only recognised the pipe whistle signature tune but also the piper's name. On visiting injured sailors he gave a guinea to each nurse who was caring for the sailors. He also gave his Nile medal to a widow who had mentioned that her late husband's medal had never arrived.

These acts sent a clear message that people matter. Individual acts of caring created a reputation that endeared Nelson to the crew, their families and the British public.

Master of communications and PR

From an early age Nelson understood that he would need to self promote. He was never slow in ensuring his feats were recorded correctly in dispatches to the Admiralty. Letter writing was an important part of his day, whether it be dispatches to inform the Admiralty, the daily requirement in running a fleet of ships, or, sending condolences to family members of dead crew.

Using mentors and having a safe haven

Nelson was blessed with a series of mentors through his life. Wise individuals who could see the potential in Nelson and became trusted advisers to him. Nelson's entry into a Naval career began early in life when his Uncle Maurice Suckling took him on as a ship boy. It was also his Uncle Suckling who facilitated Nelson's first captaincy at the age of 21.

He learnt war fare from Captain William Locker, who pointed out that the way to beat the French boat was to lie up close to her. Nelson also sought advice from Admiral Sir Peter Parker and the close friendship with Sir William Hamilton was also a source of enrichment of ideas and wise counsel.

Fearless in your pursuit legacy

Nelson's bravery is legendary,. like Churchill, he knew that nothing could be gained from fearing a dangerous situation. He believed so strongly in his destiny that events transpired to save his life during the many times he put it on the line. On one occasion, he led an attack in pitch darkness against the French where 13 sailors were pitted against a trained contingent of 30 men.. One sailor lost a hand fending off a sabre blow that would have killed Nelson.

Nelson knew, from an early age, that he would be famous and save the English from a French invasion. His conviction that he was the person for the job was contagious, and, leading up to the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson had achieved the fame he so much desired being revered wherever he went by the adoring British Public.

Nelson left a profound legacy. Firstly, on how leadership was to work within the Navy and, secondly, his band of brothers, captains he had nurtured were the mainstay for the Navy in the 20 or so years to come. Thirdly, he left the British Navy so powerful that there was not a battle involving the British navy for another 100 years..

Nelson's mastery winning leadership traits

1 Crisis Management

1.1 Crisis management

All great leaders are great in a crisis. They excel, one could say they almost live for it. In these crises their skill base separates them from others. The speed in which they can disseminate information, assess options and make a decision leaves others in their wake. For great leaders time stands still in a crisis. They have this serenity borne out of knowing they are the person for the moment. Nelson exhibited all these traits. Even the night before the battle of Trafalgar, where he knew he would surely die, he held a large dinner on board HMS Victory for his band of brothers, and, was reportedly in fine spirits.

1.2 Be flexible in tactics

Nelson knew that you needed to be flexible with tactics. He met with the captains of his fleet and discussed, many times, different scenarios. To such an extent that when they found the French fleet anchored off the Nile close to shore, they went to attack without any discussion. All the captains knew what to do. They were by that stage Nelson's clones. They attempted what the French had not seen or thought possible, which was to sail between the ships and fire on them from the small stretch of water that separated the French ships and the shore. This outrageous piece of flamboyance brought total annihilation to the French as they had their washing hanging over the shore side cannon ports.

1.3 Maintaining a sense of humour

Nelson was famous for his humour and uplifting spirit. Even when dying he wanted to wait his turn for medical attention and was concerned about the welfare of the sailors and the status of the surrendered French ships.

2 Abandonment

Nelson challenged all the old thinking that had been part of the Navy for centuries. He changed the welfare of sailors by emphasising the important of fresh fruit and vegetables. He looked after the sailors' prize money and their share of taken vessels. Nelson radically reshaped naval warfare which ensured the French fleet never had a chance. They were too rigid in their thinking, their sailors were conscripts and there was a lack of fighting spirit.

Peter Drucker, the management guru, frequently used the word "abandonment". He said "Knowing when to abandon and having the courage to do so are the two attributes one needs as a leader".

2.1 Firing Staff

Nelson was fair but demanding on his staff. Officers that had shown cowardice in the line of fire were sent to the UK to face a tribunal, and no, doubt, demotion. However when showing a firm hand he was humane. The disgraced Sir Robert Calder was allowed to sail back in his own ship to London to face the charges of cowardice in the line of fire.

As Peter Drucker said “It is the duty of the executive to remove ruthlessly anyone—and especially the manager, who consistently fails to perform with high distinction”.

3 Decision Making Ability

Nelson, like many great leaders, was very decisive. He could make the hard calls, and rely, as Jack Welch says, on his gut instinct when information was not available.

It was Nelson’s gut instinct that led to the British fleet locating the French fleet moored by the Nile mouth off shore from Egypt. It was his rapid decision to go straight into battle, even though dusk was upon them and the danger of friendly fire was very real, that left the French so unprepared.

Jack Welch points out that leaders need to make decisions when not all the information is available, he went on to say that winning leaders trust their gut instinct, knowing that they have been appointed as leader because they have made more right decisions than wrong ones.

4 Recruiting and Promoting

4.1 Recruiting carefully

Nelson surrounded himself with very competent Captains. He freely admitted that Captain Hardy was a better sailor than himself. He, like Jack Welch, saw recruiting and promoting people who are more skilled than yourself as a positive thing. Jack Welch calls it laying the “Golden Egg”.

Nelson created, as Shakespeare so famously said in Henry V’s speech, “we band of brothers”. After the famous Nile battle a print was made featuring all the captains, including one who never fired a shot, as his ship was stuck on a sand bank!

4.2 Promotion

Nelson was quick to spot young talent. Young lieutenants and captains who showed the same attributes as himself were quickly moved up the ranks. He absorbed them into his band of brothers keeping an active eye over their careers.

4.3 Nurturing Protégés

Nelson permanently changed the navy. He left the fleet with sea captains who were at the forefront of sailing, adept at applying modern techniques, understanding the detail management required to ensure a fleet was well provisioned and excelling at sailing in battle.

Peter Drucker went on to say that it was a leaders job to ensure that there was an able pool of leaders to choose from to take over your position when you move on. In other words, it is a sign of failure when an organisation needs to seek a leader from outside. If one looks at Toyota and GE, two of the best run organizations, you will be hard pressed to find a time in their history when the CEO came from outside.

5 Abundance of Positive Energy

As Jack Welch says it is important that a leader “has positive energy, the capacity to go-go-go with healthy vigour and an upbeat attitude through good times and bad”. Nelson had plenty of energy, before battle he would walk amongst the sailors and prepare them for the imminent conflict..

5.1 Never give up

Nelson never gave up his pursuit of the French fleet,(chasing them around the Mediterranean and through the straits of Gibraltar in a mad dash to the West Indies and back). When the British Navy did find the French in port they waited for months for them to come out and fight.

5.2 Many celebrations

Jack Welch says great leaders have the propensity to celebrate more. Nelson certainly did, every evening and lunch was a time for a large sit down meal. He lavishly entertained his captains, and after the “Battle of the Nile” he met annually with all the captains to celebrate the great victory.

5.3 Young at heart

Nelson had the ability to talk with the sailors from all decks. They knew he had started as a Captain’s boy below decks. A gaffer who had to run around doing errands. He knew their hardships, their language and humour. He was a one of them.

5.4 An abundance of passion

Nelson made it very clear to all the importance of the Navy to the survival of England’s sovereignty. He knew that Napoleon had to be defeated on the oceans. There was no room for defeat. The attitude he displayed and the care he showed for the common sailor, a few decks below, was a major difference between the French and the British fleets.

As Jack Welch would readily agree, one way to ignite passion is to share the spoils and Nelson was one of the most honest captains in the fleet, always ensuring the sailors got their share of the spoils.

6 Develop and Maintain Relationships with Stakeholders

6.1 Key Decision Makers

From an early age Nelson knew that he had to communicate directly with the Admiralty. He wrote his own account of events and sent these to the Admiralty.. He made sure the egos at the Admiralty were appropriately stroked so that he would get the posting he wanted and needed.

Nelson was an avid letter writer. The fact that he needed only 4 -6 hours sleep would no doubt helped. There are over 2,000 letters in collections around the world.

6.2 Be Aware of the Politics

Nelson always kept the Admiralty informed about what had happened. He ensured that while he might over ride an admiral’s decision (using his blind eye at the Battle of Copenhagen) the Admiralty knew the reasons and that he should have been in-charge in any case. His control over the situation meant that he was never reprimanded for his seemingly reckless actions.

6.3 Maintaining contact with key suppliers

Nelson, like all great leaders, understood the importance of keeping a working relationship with key suppliers. He wrote to them often discussing quality of supplies and pricing. He made it clear what was expected and that any cheating would be found out and mean a loss of contract.

7 A Student of Psychology

Nelson was ahead of his time. He realised that sailors could be coerced in to battle but would be very happy to raise the white flag unless they had a real fire in their belly. He was able to create a “all for one and one for all” mentality within the fleet. Nelson was very quick to sort out captains who did not manage their men well.

Nelson, from all accounts, was able to manage his emotions and avoid emotional outbursts that could damage relationships with his officers. He had many reasons for extreme frustration, especially when he was chasing the French Mediterranean fleet around for over 18 months before they could be engaged in battle. Yet, he was known for his humour and high spirits, during the many meals he had onboard with his officers.

8 Creating the Future

8.1 The future has to be created by the leader

As Jack Welch says “Control your destiny or someone else will”. Nelson could visualize things ahead and plan accordingly. Extensive planning needed to be performed to maintain an eight month blockade of the French fleet. Ships had to be freed from duty for repairs and fresh provisions need to be organised.

8.2 Proactive management of risk

Leaders need to be constantly aware of the risks and be discussing the likely consequences with their management team. Lord Nelson was one of the best leaders delivering this skill. He would discuss tactics endlessly over evening meals with his team. His aim was that all the captains would know what to do in the heat of battle that was best for the fleet. They would act as one, a “band of brothers”.

8.3 Bold in planning

Nelson was a bold planner. His tactics, which at first appeared high risk, were calculated and discussed at great length. The two major defeats of the French were performed using tactics that had not been undertaken before. In the Battle of Trafalgar, by sailing directly into the centre of the French fleet the Victory would have to face two minutes of bombardment before they could return fire. He knew his sailors would be brave and weather the storm, and secondly, they would relish the chance to fire at the unguarded stern and bow of the French boats that the Victory sailed between.

8.4 Provision for the team

Nelson spent many hours guaranteeing that this ships and crew were better provisioned, fitter, healthier and better trained than the French. Thus he could be assured that in an unfavourable contest the British fleet would prevail.

Great leaders ensure their staff are well provisioned and see to it personally. Where a leader loses focus on provisioning only mayhem will be the result.

9 Managing through the (organisation's) critical

success factors

Nelson's motto in battle was to get up close to the French. He knew the British ships could fire their cannons more frequently and more quickly and thus the end result would always be submission after a fair amount of carnage on both sides.

The sailors followed Nelson's view that death in combat was a noble way to go. The survivors were assured a share of the spoils.

10 Champion of Innovation, Quality and Learning

10.1 Embracing innovation and quality

When young officers came up with ideas that clearly were not sound he would acknowledge the idea and gently point out the problems with the concept.

Nelson was innovative from the beginning. In one sea battle Nelson boarded a ship only to find a better one along side. Seizing the moment he jumped across to storm the bigger prize, the San Josef. Such was the surprise that both captains surrendered to a smaller force.

10.2 Flexibility of tactics

Nelson knew that his captains would know, instinctively, what to do in the heat of battle and thus gave very little instruction once the fleet was engaged in battle. Captains were given flexibility to execute.

10.3 Approach Problems with your Ignorance

This is a classic Drucker insight. At first you wondered about Drucker's sanity until you dig deeper. Drucker is saying that leaders, great leaders, do not regurgitate old methods for new processes. They are open to right brain thinking, they accept that "what everybody knows is frequently wrong".

Nelson challenged all the old ways of running a navy. He saw most methods as inefficient and not enabling the British Navy the advantage it would need in battle. He thus set about, with his band of brothers, introducing innovation right across the board.

11 Execution

11.1 "Execution first always"

Nelson was excellent at execution. Peter Drucker said that execution was always the benchmark to evaluate a leader. Clearly, leaders need to be able to say yes, no or maybe. As Drucker pointed out good leaders realize that a decision, even if wrong, is often better than no decision.

11.2 Finishing What You Start

Nelson saw his role as finishing off any threat from the French on the Seas.. After the success of the Battle of Trafalgar Britannia ruled the waves for the next 100 years.

Many initiatives fail because the leader does not get behind the project enough. Many leaders have an attention deficit disorder that would rival a teenagers'..

12 Develop, Engage and Trust

12.1 'Energize'(motivate) others

Jack Welch puts this trait in his top five of 'must haves' for leaders, it is the ability to release the team's members positive energy "to take any hill". Nelson had the knack to energize others. They shared his passion for the Navy and the need to succeed over the French and Spanish fleets.

12.2 Giving recognition freely

Nelson gave recognition freely to his staff. To him gratitude was all part of the day's work for a leader. He understood that recognition is more important than most of us understand. He knew that some members needed it more than others, and did not worry about the potential inequality.

I believe recognition is one of the most important driving force in performance. Yet so many companies, managers and leaders believe it has to be given sparingly, as if too much recognition would water it down. There appears to be a tax on recognition. McDonalds and other companies have taken this tax on recognition to the ultimate by having an employee of the month, indicating only one staff member can achieve this. What does it say to the rest of the staff? Surely if four staff succeeded then four staff should be given the award!

12.3 Fitness and health of the team

Great leaders care about their staff. Nelson spent much time provisioning fresh supplies for his fleet. This task was not easy when you realise that these boats had no refrigeration and could be at sea months at a time.

12.4 Know your staff inside out

Nelson realised the importance of knowing the team inside out. There are many famous stories about how he could remember sailors. One story was that he remembered a sailor from his distinctive ship whistle tune amongst a large crowd greeting him on one of this tours around England.

13 Valuing Results and People

Drucker was adamant that goals should stretch the team. They should be possible but a big ask. He was however equally adamant that they should not be used to beat up staff who were not achieving them.

Nelson always had ambitious goals. He was always ready to take the French on no matter what the odds. Trusting on team work, a shared objective and a do or die attitude.

Whilst being a sailor in Nelson's fleet meant a retirement was not guaranteed sailors and officers knew that when not in battle their livelihood was very much at the forefront of the commander's mind.

14 Gather and Learn From Experiences

From an early age, Nelson looked for experience. At the age of 12, he was a cabin boy on his first sea voyage. He learned from working with both great and not-so-great captains. He sought to sail with captains who were known for their abilities. He used his uncle's connections to secure the opportunities that a gifted leader should have. He left nothing to chance. Nelson managed his experiences and his career.

14.1 Learn about the organisation in order to lead

Drucker said that a leader needs to have experience in the enterprise he or she is running. Nelson knew more about the navy than any of his fellow admirals. He, unlike them, had started in the Navy as a captain's boy at the age of twelve.

14.2 Leadership Can Be Learned

While truly great leaders are probably born, not made, many good qualities can be embedded in one's leadership style. Nelson had very carefully planned his leadership roles so that he was always experienced enough for his next promotion.

15 Writer's biography



David Parmenter is an international presenter who is known for his thought provoking and lively sessions, which have led to substantial change in many organisations. David is a leading expert in: the development of winning KPIs, replacing the annual planning process with quarterly rolling planning, quick month-end processes and making reporting a decision based tool.

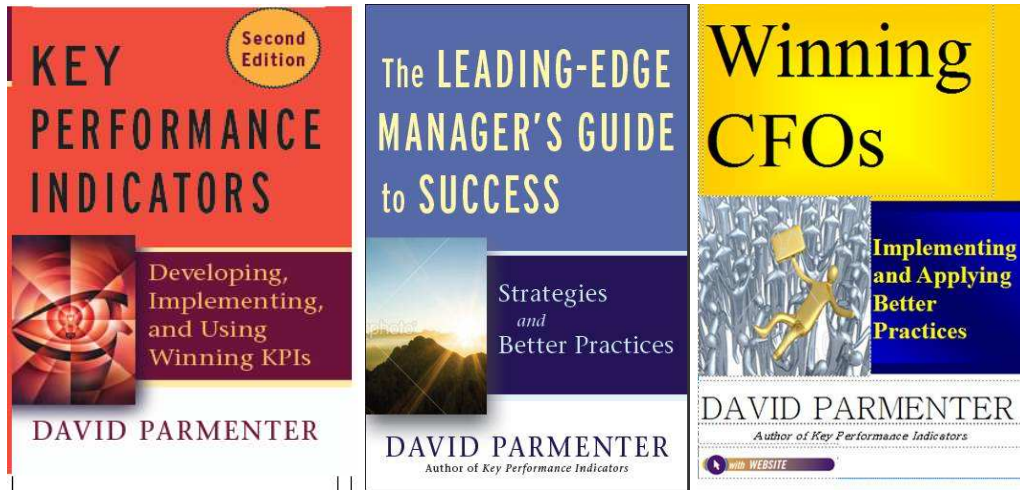
His work on KPIs has received international recognition through; an award from the International Federation of Accountants, the popularity of his webcasts on www.bettermanagement.com, and the success of his KPI books.

He has speaking engagements as far afield as Auckland, Wellington, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra, Perth, Darwin, Darussalam, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Jeddah, Tehran, Toronto, Prague, Rome, Dublin, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh.

John Wiley & Sons Inc have recently published two books titled "Winning CFOs: Implementing and Applying Better Practices" and "The leading-edge Manager's guide to success – strategies and better practices. His "Key Performance Indicators – developing, implementing and using winning KPIs" is now in its second edition and is a best seller.

David has also worked for Ernst & Young, BP Oil Ltd, Arthur Andersen, and Price Waterhouse. David is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

He has written over 50 articles for the accounting and management journals. He has won two 'article of merit' awards from the International Federation of Accountants. (2007 and 2009). His published articles titles include: "*Quarterly rolling planning - removing the barriers to success*", "*Throw away the annual budget*", "*Beware corporate mergers*", "*Implementing a Balanced Scorecard in 16 weeks not 16 months*", "*Convert your monthly reporting to a management tool*", "*Smash through the performance barrier*", "*Is your board reporting process out of control?*" "*Implementing winning Key Performance Indicators*", "*Quick month end reporting*" "*conquest leadership- lessons from Sir Ernest Shackleton*" etc.



ⁱ *Nelson's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Commander* by Jonathan Gosling and Stephanie Jones Nicholas Brealey London (October 13, 2005) ISBN-10: 1857883713