



Unlikely Leaders

Sir Simon Rattle

Nicholas Logie:

He's born in Liverpool and he's very proud of his origins as a Liverpudlian. He has an immense amount of energy and has never lost his humanity. He knows what he can bring but he wants to do it through being a good friend, a good colleague.

I've chosen Simon Rattle as my unlikely leader.

My name is Nicholas Logie. I've just completed a PhD at the Open University. I was part of the Music Department researching into leadership and conductors.

Today we're in the Royal Festival Hall and I'm here to rehearse with my orchestra, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

And this is a venue and an orchestra with which Simon Rattle works at least once a year. If you said to Simon Rattle, "What do you think about leadership?" he would probably say, "What? Leader? No, I'm not a leader."

I think the reluctance of conductors like Rattle is partly their dedication to the composer. Conductors talk of themselves as leading through the music, or acting as a conduit or channel to plumb the depths, to really get inside what the composer intended.

The great thing about Simon Rattle is that he's very, very open about describing the leadership process.

"I'm a person who wakes up every morning with more and more doubts than the morning before. I can't stress how true it is that the person who conducts is not the same person that's sitting here. There's a moment of metamorphosis that you have to go through. If you haven't really tried to undergo that metamorphosis, you'd better not go on stage."

Now, what I think that shows is that the activity of leadership, it should not be different from the person that's inside, otherwise it isn't genuine. But you've got to understand that, as a leader, you've got to project something which is almost superhuman, more than the private person themselves.

One of the most fascinating aspects of conductors is that they don't make a sound. And, after all, orchestras' music is all about making sound. And Peter Drucker, the management guru, picked on this in his writings.

The fact that the conductor has to coordinate the expertise that's in the orchestra, he has to rely on the expertise. And one of the special things about Simon is his awareness that he has to work in different ways within different contexts. And there are very big differences between the North-American/British way that conductors work and the Central European way. It's, I think, fair to say that British orchestras and North American orchestras are more adaptable and more flexible, but maybe don't have such a strong tradition that they want to get across. They have traditions but they're not so hung up on their own way of doing things.

Whereas, many of the Central European orchestras pride themselves in their tradition and what they have brought from, let's face it, the 19th century. And they don't want to lose that.

And Rattle is so aware that he's got to work with that and, as it were, guide it towards a common goal. Again, he doesn't want to lose his individuality. After all, what he has to offer as a musician and a conductor is what the orchestra wants. There are conductors still around who come with their agenda and want to push that through. What I find so exciting about Rattle, however, is his ability to adapt as a leader and as a conductor.

I think it was the first week that I went to university and I was given a book list. And on that book list were the Lectures in Physics by Richard Feynman. He was rather an unconventional person. He hated wearing a tie and he had a healthy disrespect for people who thought they were very, very important and in high places.