

## **LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM TANGO...** **(Part 1)**

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## **LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM TANGO...**

### **(Part 1)**

I just came back from Buenos Aires and my mind and heart are still filled with tango. Actually, I am eager to share with you some leadership lessons one can learn from tango.

To be honest, I did not go to Buenos Aires to do some applied research on leadership! I went there to learn tango. However, I could not help but notice the striking similarities of tango and leadership. Who would have guessed that tango lessons could be so applicable to leadership?

#### **First lesson: If the follower doesn't follow, blame the leader.**

This is a tough lesson, but also a healthy and stimulating one. It is an idea you may want to challenge at times, or even rebel against.

**In tango, anytime your follower "makes a mistake" and doesn't follow as you expected, it is considered a clear indication that you did not lead properly, that your message or direction was not clear enough.**

Some evidence here comes from observing a beginner follow a leader who is not really good at leading yet. Their dancing will lack harmony.

However, the same beginner dancing with a skilled leader will often produce beautiful movements. Where does the difference come from? It can only come from the quality of the leadership.

**Second lesson: Leading is best achieved by merely opening the way and showing the direction, not by "pulling" the follower.**

For example, a change of direction is achieved by the leader opening his chest and his shoulders, by opening the way to the follower, not by pulling the follower's arm and body. If the way is clear, the follower will start moving naturally in the chosen direction.

Isn't this very similar when it comes to leading people? **I have lost the count of leaders I know who have become disillusioned or even angry after being constantly "pulled" by their top leader.**

What is tricky here is that this top leader often is a strong leader who is admired by others (and by himself or herself!) for his or her drive, energy, and strength. The "pulling" or excessive aggressiveness can be seen as a mere collateral damage from all these qualities. However, pulling makes bad leadership, which is consistently reported as the main reason people leave corporations.

Similarly, in tango, too much "pulling" can often leave your follower frustrated and angry, impatient to leave the dance floor.

This lesson from tango can also be related to the principle of ownership that is so crucial in coaching. **By opening the way and showing the direction, but not "pulling", we leave the ownership to our followers.**

This creates engagement, and most importantly, enjoyment. Being in close contact through my marriage to artists of all kinds, I have come to realize that the notion of enjoyment, both for the leader and the follower, while central in arts, is greatly under-utilized in business leadership.

I see it as a big pity, and a lost opportunity. This will be at the heart of two more lessons to be discussed next month in part two of this article. In the meantime, I wish you the very best.

Warmly  
Sebastien



Sebastien Henry is **Progress-U's expert for Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and stress management**. He works with executives who would like to:

- avoid feeling exhausted and uprooted as their career takes them to the top;
- become more inspiring leaders by developing their Emotional Intelligence (EQ) at work; and, as a consequence,
- be able to motivate their people more and retain the best.

Sebastien is convinced that leaders who know how to strengthen and use their Emotional Intelligence can make a big difference in their respective organizations because they are leaders for whom people want to commit and give their best.

Sebastien worked in an Asia-Pacific regional position at a multinational company and has also worked with Japanese and Chinese teams in Tokyo and Shanghai, respectively. His experience allowed him to practice the art of leading and listening across cultures and to experiment extensively on how to develop Emotional Intelligence in his daily work life. He is currently writing a book on this topic.

His articles on Emotional Intelligence in Leadership have been published in Human Resources and South China Morning Post.

Sebastien draws the tools he uses and shares from several areas of his life: his business experience as a corporate executive, his intensive practice of mountaineering and rock climbing (7a on-sight and more than 50 alpine routes), his involvement in teaching and coaching prisoners, and his daily meditations for more than six years.

He has coached several high-ranking executives, including an Asia/Pacific General Manager, a Country General Manager, and Department Heads.

His native language is French, but he also speaks and writes in Mandarin, English, and Japanese.

His credentials include:

- MBA, BA in Psychology, BA in Philosophy,
- Certified NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner,
- Certified NLP Trainer (NLP, USA),
- Certified Coach (ICC),
- More than 40 days of training with the Gestalt approach at the Paris School of Gestalt,
- Certified Trainer of the "EQ Impact Learning" program (Talentsmart, USA).

Sebastien gives one-to-one executive coaching, key note speeches, and group seminars and workshops such as listed below:

- EQ for Managers
- EQ for personal effectiveness
- Stress management
- INSPIRE! A 6-day personal journey for leaders