



## **Module 1: Managing Self through Development of the Reflective Mindset**

**24 March 2016**

Justin Featherstone lecturer of the first module said: Reading Winnie the Pooh and drinking more tea –the recipe for finding out leadership potential in your people.

By Ladeja Godina Košir.

On the photo: Justin Featherstone. (Photo: Ladeja Godina Košir)

The story of a man, who had been serving in the army for 18 years before becoming an expert in leadership, is amazing. His empathy is fascinating. Justin Featherstone knew that he would like to become a soldier since he was a little boy. But he never dreamed about becoming a facilitator, communicator or an amazing leader himself. After leaving the job in the army, he stepped into a completely new world. Since then he has still been managing to put his skills, experience and knowledge in balance with intuition, leadership and strong ethics. Experiencing his lecture is like an exploration journey which smoothly brings you into the depth of your true self. MC spoke to Justin Featherstone during his recent visit at FELU's Centre for Business Excellence in Ljubljana, where he participated as a guest lecturer at a multi-module executive leadership programme.

### **How about values: which are your three or five top values?**

My values most definitely relate to people first, process second. The idea of utmost integrity and moral courage – so, standing up and saying and doing the right thing even if it is disadvantageous to do so. Being moral demands a particular boldness in ethical issues. Also, I believe it is important to physically fight for that. As an ex-soldier I suppose that would make sense. - And challenge. - I would add the idea of passion of people-first, a true commitment, moral courage and welcoming and delivering challenge – that's what will create a community. And a community is to me an essential value.

### **What kinds of leaders are needed today to meet these values?**

Honest ones! We need people with flexible minds, from very diverse backgrounds willing to challenge in the environment that encourages and welcomes challenge and doesn't punish people

for being different or saying different things. We need honesty and we need authenticity. So the diversity and the inclusion must be central to anything that we do and gender equality is a huge issue. For me equality should just be equality – full stop. We shouldn't break that down. Then, on the other hand, we can have diversity of thought, diversity of people in every way and openness to challenge... And we should punish with the full weight of the law those who abuse the trust of the people they are meant to be serving. And I am pretty passionate about that. When you are a public servant I think you are required to uphold standards of behaviour that may be head and shoulders above the normal expectations in the society, because you are representing those people. And there are not many governments who haven't been subject to some kind of exposure over poor behaviours of its democratic representatives.

**Are you generally optimistic about the future?**

I am always optimistic. If you look at human beings in the past, particularly in Europe, this has always been a volatile kind of place. Look at the region we sit in. This area has been a home of civilisation for millennia. We've always done alright. We've seen the rise and fall of the Greek empire, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire ... You know, all the time, the nations used to fight - until the 1921, and then the Second World War and the regional dissolution in the 90's, but actually time and time again, after the entropy ...

**... a disaster was followed by a recovery?**

My friend who is a psychotherapist talks about human beings as self-righting objects, they just always seem to come back up. So, in terms of our ability to reconcile ourselves, to find character in truth, where it matters, and to do the right thing when things are really bad, I think we actually do have this ability. What we are not very good at is talking about it. I suppose we are just too busy and we need to make that space to have those conversations. They will not happen in the hierarchies, They will happen across the strata of every nation, it has happened outside the academic circles and this dialogue needs to be much broader than that. But in terms of the outcome I am absolutely optimistic. I know it will be fine because it always is.

**What was the reason you decided to quit the army where you served for 18 years?**

Boredom. I was never going to be a general, I wasn't that good. I would probably be a full corporal by the end of my career and I would have had a regiment, but not an operational regiment, I wasn't at top 5%. So there was an element of that. But actually when I left at the end of the year 2007, the finance crisis was beginning to happen, and the market for new-coming enterprises was not great. It was not impossible to make it, but I had to sell my house and I haven't earned any money for two years and I wasn't proud of that. I think you might say I was irresponsible, or, as my friends would say, reckless...

**No, I think it is courage that you need ...**

No, I don't think I was at that level of cognitive understanding!

**So it was rather intuitive ...**

Correct, exactly, I didn't challenge it too much, because I think, if I did, it would've been madness. I never refused a meeting when people asked me »Would you do this, would you do that? «, and so I went climbing and tracking ...

**What have you learned from that period when you were yourself with your knowledge and your experience, starting on your own and, finally, opportunities started coming to you? How would you explain that experience?**

First of all, I had to do what a general once advised me. He said: »Never turn down a cup of coffee, never turn down a lunch. « Doesn't matter if you are sure you are not interested, one has to have the courtesy to go and talk to people, be open-minded and it will work out. And that was the best advice I ever had, so people would say, come talk to me, and even if I knew I didn't want to work with them, I would just chat. And then those network would mean that even if I didn't end up working for them, sometimes it would go: »Oh, would you come and do this, would you come and do that..? « I'd left school at 16 so I was one of a very few officers who didn't have a degree. And I got sort of my higher education in the military. So I went to do the masters as well. That was quite an important thing for me. I did outdoor education, in terms of my climbing and tracking instruction, but also in terms of leadership and fellowship understanding. So, I stretched myself intellectually and practically. And I was still determined to have fun. I had fun for 18 years and I wasn't going to stop.

**Let's move back to leadership. Is this an ability one is born with?**

That's basically what has been argued for a few thousand years, starting from Aristotle. What is charisma, »karismos«? I would argue that you can also have a dark charisma, which is sort of Hitler, Ceausescu, etc. For me, it is more helpful to speak about leadership rather than leaders. The difference is in what is shared, what can be understood, what can be distributed. I think most of the research shows that leadership is not inborn. Natural ratio of communication might be, but that's not leadership. For me, a leader is someone who has a true power and authenticity, aim or core, whatever that might be that they stick to, and is able to build and keep trust. Such people might be very quiet, socially incompetent and poor speakers, but what they are is sustainable leaders and they create leadership in their own way. So I think we often look in the wrong place for leaders. And we promote wrong people as well, because we tend to choose those who are noisy and are in our own image. However, we can definitely develop leaders. And we develop them by developing everybody rather than by trying to pick out our potential, that's my passionate thought. Give everybody the same opportunity and allow people to be creative and to share innovation in their work, and then you will find your leaders - often the people you've ignored. They may not be your top revenue owners, but equally, they won't bring your company down. And we often have missed these people.

**How can we recognise people with this leadership potential?**

Drink more tea. You need to have conversations with each and every individual regularly in an informal setting, where you just listen and say nothing. And that's what we don't do often enough. We know we should do it, it's just in time we think it's not a priority. So we've got to know our people and then we need to know what is important to them, and we need to be present to support them. Coaching culture makes a huge difference. We need to understand that we are not creating

leaders in our image, we are creating leaders for the future, and they may look so different to us! And we need people around us to help us see that. So, I think diversity is the key, and drinking loads of tea – or coffee, or water. So look beyond what I think is an outmoded paradigm.