

Leadership is a performance art

Why I watched Glastonbury – it is not why you might think!

Glastonbury, Glyndebourne, cricket, tennis, Olympics or jazz. From time to time we all stop and get absorbed in whatever our ‘thing’ is. This last week mine was Glastonbury. We live and work in a multigenerational, multicultural society so understanding varying musical tastes is a good starting point for connecting with each other.

It also provided the opportunity to broaden my musical horizons and experiment with listening to artists I had never contemplated. And most importantly for my work in [leadership and innovation](#) to observe how these mega-bands build their *muscle for success*. And how does their *presence* open up the opportunity for genuine connection and this, combined with their music, impact the festival audience. Performing at a festival adds another level of complexity as the audience is not necessarily made up of your own fans.

The quality of the connection and the interaction with the audience and the bouncing off the energy of fellow band members all serve to compel them to excel in their performance.

How do they feel after a gig? Liam Gallagher came off the stage saying he felt ‘spaced out’, Rag’n Bone man said he was moved to tears. A whole rainbow of responses - high, exhausted, incapacitated, exhilarated. And sadly, as we too often read, sometimes an artist’s response is so extreme it can cause life-long damage.



What has this got to do with leadership?

It is about building your *muscle for success*. Learning to lead the self and others is an embodied art. Gaining information from books or webinars is only a cognitive activity, until it is in the body it is hard to fully master leadership.

Artists connect emotionally and listen well and even though they might be internally overwhelmed by the enormity of the task of providing a stellar performance they stay connected to delivering. As Radiohead advised first time performers headlining on the 100000+ Pyramid stage: – It is not about ‘you’ it is about the festival and being of service to the whole event and showing you care. Performing well demonstrates care which equals fans.

So how does the body respond to mega-success? Success is an incoming pressure to the human system just like failure is or any interruption to the smooth running of life and work. How do you respond to a promotion? Or winning a new deal? What internal psychobiological changes occur? We are familiar with our reptilian response of [flight, fight or freeze](#) - our default behaviours. Recognizing we have choice helped by mindfulness practices or digital detoxes are doing much to counter this and help us respond more skilfully.



If success tapped you on the shoulder tomorrow telling you all your wildest ambitions were realized. How do you respond physiologically? Do you feel momentarily knocked off balance? Or a subtler response? Do your eyes flicker from side to side revealing your discomfort with this new pressure? Do you receive it with ease and take it all in your stride? If, yes you have toned your *muscle of success*.

The muscle for success is:

- Having the capacity to physically, mentally and emotionally tolerate increasing success and the intense scrutiny which invariably comes with it.
- This means, in Glastonbury terms, being able to perform in front of large audiences, to tolerate the mass social and physical media attention notoriety attracts.
- To be able to live and work so you can perform and be at your best either in the workplace, on stage or at home with family and friends.

Ed Sheeran started playing on small stages to 500 and gradually built up to 1000s. However, he famously took a year off from performing to replenish and create a new template of success. His success had become overwhelming, his self-sabotaging habits skyrocketing out of control. He had the perspicacity and/or his fellow song writer in his entourage did, to press the pause button, reorganize by stepping back, switching off and rebuilding his capacity for success. He was forced to look at things differently. He is human. We too have the capacity to take a hard look at our routines.

As I take centre stage as a leader are my daily routines serving me as I gain increased responsibility and visibility?

Sheeran came back refreshed and had 16 songs listed on the Top 20 singles chart this year.

As Rag'n Bone Man said "I'm only human after all".

A year out to refocus maybe not – a day maybe? Checkout [Focus Days here?](#)
Further reading see [here](#)

