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What every leader can learn from “The King’s Speech”

By [Guest Blogger](#) on May 23, 2011 | [Comments \(13\)](#)

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This guest post is by Dennis S. Reina and Michelle L. Reina, co-authors of “Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace” and “Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace.” They are co-founders of the [Reina Trust Building Institute](#).



In the movie “The King’s Speech,” England’s King George VI turns to Lionel Logue, an unorthodox Australian speech therapist, to overcome his stammer. The two men become friends as they work together, and after his brother abdicates the British throne, the reluctant king relies on Logue to help him make a radio broadcast at the beginning of World War II.

We also see the movie as a parable — a story about a leader healing from the wounds of broken trust. King George VI had to heal from childhood betrayal before he could “find his voice” and become the leader his country needed at the brink of war. The king, however, found it extremely hard to ask for — and accept — support that he, as that would-be leader, needed.

If you’re like most leaders, you, too, struggle with asking for, and accepting, support — support you might need to perform, such as King George VI, to your most powerful potential. You probably think you should be able to go it alone, to have all of the answers. Yet, in failing to receive support, odds are you are depriving yourself — and your organization — of your true greatness. Accepting support isn’t a sign of weakness; it’s a sign of courage and strength. Only strong, self-aware leaders can size up a situation and see, realistically, what they can or cannot face alone.

In our work with leaders, we find that there are at least three common, instinctive reactions to the idea of receiving support. Our advice and insight for how to deal with them:

“I’m the leader here. I can’t let on that I need help.”

Sure, you can. People expect you to lead, and if accepting support from others will help you be an even better leader, it’s your best course of action. What’s more, by example, you’re letting your leadership team, among others, know that it’s OK to receive support, embrace their human-ness and to

learn and grow through and with other people. That awareness can deepen their connection and commitment to one another and to the organization. It also builds trust and respect.

“I don’t know whom I can trust. I don’t want to open myself up to be vulnerable.”

Make a wise choice — and take the risk. Playing it close to the vest might be your default, but that doesn’t mean it’s the smartest thing to do. Also, ask yourself whether you’re really concerned about trust or, more likely, about letting others in. During highly stressful periods, you might unreasonably question everyone’s intentions. Resist those doubts and fears. They can — and will — hold you back.

“I want to be the best leader I can be for my organization. That has nothing to do with my personal life.”

Really? You’re a whole person, and your success comes from the sum of your experiences. Additionally, as a leader, your ability to build and rebuild trust with others has a lot to do with how you’ve dealt with — or haven’t dealt with — situations of broken trust in your life. If you don’t want to “go there” with someone within your organization, look for someone on the outside — your Lionel Logue.

Image credit: Laurie Sparham, The Weinstein Co.

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Elizabeth Houlihan · 20 weeks ago

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Excellent insights to which I would also add that leaders reside everywhere, not just at the top of the "kingdom." As portrayed in the film, Mr. Logue never gave up believing in his cause -- helping the would be king achieve his goals. Zig Ziegler, the world class sales training guru, often reminds us that, "You can get everything you want out of life if you'll just help enough other people get what they want." By doing just that, and never giving up on his subject, Mr. Logue helped King George VI and the world get what they needed most, when they most needed it.

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The strength of leadership exhibited by Mr. Logue is astounding in that he so believed in his talent to make a difference that despite the rejection he persisted. His humility and lack of ego interference was well illustrated.

The other lesson is the practice of asking for help and guidance from those you may not feel 'are your equal'. Now, more and more of our clients have very young mentors who are graciously helping them to embrace the new technology.

Wonderful lessons..thank you for your comments.

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[Report](#)[Andy Green](#) · 20 weeks ago

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The King's Speech is a powerful parable for business managers - I am a UK creativity consultant and have identified a further 6 lessons inspired by the film - check out <http://tiny.cc/oceln>

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Diana Echols · 20 weeks ago

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Great guest blog! All three tips made sense and the third particularly resonated - we are whole people and who we are at home is indeed who we bring to work.

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[Report](#)[travelwithlaughter](#) 1p · 20 weeks ago

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Loved this movie! You pointed out exactly what we as "leaders" need to take from the movie and implement.

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galt · 20 weeks ago

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Another insight that should be mentioned is the confidentiality (trust factor) of the relationship between Logue and the King). Without that, things would not have been as successful.

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[Report](#)[tim milburn](#) · 19 weeks ago

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This movie provided a compelling illustration to show there are certain "weaknesses" that a leader will need to work on. I'm a fan of identifying and working as much as possible in the area of one's strengths. But it was clear that the King

couldn't be an effective King unless he overcame his speech impediment. Couldn't delegate that one out.

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[Michelle Reina](#) · 19 weeks ago

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We sure do all have our weaknesses and they can hold us back - if we allow them to. It strikes me that, as was the case with the King, we all experience the fear of failure or not measuring up. I for sure have had those experiences. With Lionel's support the King found the inner courage to own and work through his fear providing a great example for us all. It would be nice if we could delegate conquering our fears. But we all have our work to do. I am grateful for the Lionel's in my life!

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[Steve McCarthy](#) · 19 weeks ago

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A great movie and I agree that as leaders we try to overcome our weaknesses. Two points I liked in the movie: Lionel Logue requested that he be called Lionel and that he would call the King "Bertie". This leveled the playing field and allowed Lionel to give instructions to a King uncomfortable taking instructions. The second is the importance of good communication skills. Today we take for granted that a leader be able to communicate effectively and persuasively but even 70 years ago, the ability to communicate well was a necessary skill.

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[Michelle Reina](#) · 19 weeks ago

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I appreciate these comments and insights offered. We are indeed whole people. Reflecting upon who we are at home can help us understand how we bring ourselves to work.

Lionel was so clear in his intention to be of support to the King. His clear intentionality and the safe, confidential container of support he created made it safe for the King to expose his vulnerability. As he stepped into and moved through his vulnerability he discovered more fully 'who' he was and learned how to trust himself. The process of healing was a gift to himself and to the many lives he was then able to touch. The movie further illustrated for me the power of compassion and just what we can discover when we give ourselves permission to be human.

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[Greg Herman](#) · 19 weeks ago

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Loved The King's Speech. Best movie I've seen in a long time. Never saw it as a parable about leadership. Very good insights. Thanks for sharing.

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[Michael Sansolo](#) · 19 weeks ago

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All movies give us great leadership lessons and the King's Speech is one of the best. My favorite comes early when the elderly King George explains how radio broadcasts are transforming his connection to his people. New realities hit us all the time.

I have a bias on articles like this as my book "The big picture" is full of lessons movies provide to business leaders.

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[Kevin Coupe](#) · 19 weeks ago

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Here is the line that Michael is referring to, spoken by King George V:

"In the past all a King had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now we must invade people's homes and ingratiate ourselves with them.

"This family is reduced to those lowest, basest of all creatures. We've become...actors!"

The point is that business leaders can no longer afford to be passive in regard to their employees, business partners and customers. It is like a constant courtship ...

Or, to make reference to another movie about a vastly different subject, taking place in a vastly different place and time, it is no longer a matter of "if you build it, they will come." But, like Michael (my co-author), it is virtually impossible for me to see a movie these days and not see a "big picture" business lesson.

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