

Being a Thought Leader: Thinking the Unthinkable

Clive Longbottom,
Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

- Being someone who:
 - Shapes the direction of others
 - and/or
 - Creates new markets
 - and/or
 - Finds new ideas that change the future
 - and/or
 - Identifies trends at an early stage

- Academia/semi academia
 - E.g. Stephen Hawkins, John Nash, Linus Torvalds, Tim Berners-Lee
- Commerce
 - E.g. John Chambers, John Harvey Jones, Charles Dunstone
- Government
 - E.g. Milton Friedman, Alan Greenspan
- Repression
 - E.g. Mohandas Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther-King
- Religion
 - E.g. The Dalai Lama, Many local religious representatives
- The Arts
 - E.g. Damien Hirst, Benjamin Zephania,
- Professional Thought Leaders
 - E.g. Mike Hammer, Geoffrey Moore

- Academia
 - E.g. The jobbing Professor/Don
- Commerce
 - E.g. Richard Branson, Arun Sarin
- Government
 - E.g. Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher
- Repression
 - E.g. Osama Bin Laden, Timothy McVeigh
- Religion
 - E.g. The Pope, The Archbishop of Canterbury
- The Arts
 - E.g. Tracy Emin, Andrew Motion
- Professional Thought Leaders
 - 98% of them..... (or is this too low?)

- The quiet person in the team who:
 - Never seems to work, but never has anything left over
 - Doesn't say a lot, but listens a lot
 - Persuades others that ideas were their own
 - Never seems to really fit, but can do any job
 - Has few friends, but lots of hobbies
- Not all Thought Leaders are Social Leaders!

- Understands an area in great depth
- Can position this knowledge in context
- Can listen, can hear and can check
- Can absorb new information rapidly
- Is not afraid to *change* their mind
- Is not afraid to *share* their mind

- Probably not:
 - Needs an open mind while taking a strong stance
 - Needs humility combined with arrogance
 - Needs to be able to see the links that others can't
 - Needs to be self capable, but capable of making use of others
 - Needs to be able to think the unthinkable
 - Needs the right environment

- Low external pressure
 - Thought leaders can be obsessive in their own area – outside pressures can defocus them
- “Their” environment
 - If they want to think while in the bath, so be it – if they need an open space to walk up and down in, great, if they need to be playing on a PS2, go for it...
- Unconstrained
 - Never tell a Thought Leader to go off and do something specific: it doesn't work like that

- It's not about products, about revenues or about strategy
- It is about brand, profile, trust, direction
- It is about blue sky thinking, early stage ideas
- The idea is to paint pictures beyond the event horizon

- There's a lot of charlatans out there
 - Thought Leadership is not about snake oil, smoke and mirrors, selling books or appearing on stage
- Thought Leaders are not revenue generators
 - They help create brand, profile and trust
 - But they can also easily damage them
- It's difficult to “train” to be a thought leader
 - A lot of pre-requisites need to be there
- Many Thought Leaders work in the background
 - You may have one in your team
 - Use their skills and give support and guarded recognition