

No-nonsense approach shakes up the world of leadership training



Carol Lewis

When Sir Gus O'Donnell, the Cabinet Secretary, wanted some advice on how to get things done more effectively around Whitehall, one of the people he turned to was Steve Radcliffe — a quietly spoken management coach of whom few people had heard.

Mr Radcliffe is a straight-speaking Lancashire man. He lacks the celebrity, and PR agents, which usually accompany management gurus.

When we met he arrived alone, clutching a small self-published book, *Future, Engage, Deliver* and admitted he had never met a journalist. His book — which he published two years ago and distributes for a nominal fee — and coaching business, have achieved success by word of mouth alone.

Mr Radcliffe's no-nonsense approach to leadership is taught on the High Potential Civil Servant Leadership Scheme and he has sat on a think-tank about leadership development in schools. He has worked across government, schools and the NHS — and has coached more than 40 permanent secretaries and chief executives.

Now he has done something else that marks him out from the ranks of management authors — he has published a low-cost (£5 or less) updated version of *Future, Engage, Deliver*, solely for the

not-for-profit sector called *How to Make a Bigger Difference*. At the same time he has struck a more conventional book deal with a publishing house to produce a larger and more expensive version, called *Leadership: plain and simple*.

He is keen, though, not to be seen as a “do-gooder”. “I want to make a bigger difference than just being a bloke who wrote a business book. So I’m starting a campaign to encourage more people in the public sector, and everywhere else, to see themselves as leaders,” he said.

Mr Radcliffe is an Oxbridge graduate whose first job was with Procter and Gamble, after which he became chief executive of a US division of a multinational company before reorganising a European business. Then 20 years ago, aged 38, he packed it all in to coach leaders. He has no training as a coach or a psychologist. “I’ve read and borrowed ideas and philosophies and packaged up my own approach which seems to work,” he explained.

He says that he has watched leaders for 20 years and read more than 200 books on leadership and believes leadership comes down to three simple principles: future — “you have to be good at imagining the future,” engage — “you need other people to want to build the future with you”, deliver — “you’ve got to make stuff happen”.

Mr Radcliffe says this boils down to: “Being up to something, being in touch with what you care about and going for it. How people perform at these three is more important than psychometric profiles and leadership competencies.”

He says that leaders are rarely good at all three, but they can learn.

Last month, Mr Radcliffe was picked as a “rising star” by the compilers of *The Thinker’s 50* list of the most influential management thinkers. Aside from publishing his book, he has also now built a website and talks excitedly about podcasts and greater media exposure. So far, his success has been based on his low-key no-nonsense approach. It would be a shame if his new found celebrity detracted from that. www.futureengagedeliver.com