


5 leadership lessons from key events during 2019

 By [Brian Eagar](#)

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Some may argue that 2019 has been a tough year - consider organisations such as SAA which continues on what seems to be a downward spiral. It certainly was a terrible one for Thomas Cook which [collapsed](#), Forever 21 which closed as many as [178 stores](#) and filed for bankruptcy protection, as did major South African contractor [Group Five](#).



Brian Eagar

It wasn't all doom and gloom though. Whether linked to positive or sad news stories, several local and foreign leaders have made us stop and think about how we are leading and living. Let's consider some of the values that just a few of these role-models espoused.

Innovation

Native South African Rodney Sacks found himself listed as number 11 on the Forbes [Innovative Leaders](#) list for 2019. While Rodney's Monster Beverage Corp might have faced a stock decrease during the year, their focus on innovation is poised to continue producing great things for the future. Having recently launched a range of new drinks, including a vegan-friendly version, Sacks recognises that consumers want new and exciting offerings all the time - which is why their innovation pipeline won't be slowing down soon. The proof of this approach is in the pudding – they have [increased net income by 10%](#) within a year.

In a world of VUCA, remaining relevant and agile is a non-negotiable. Leaders must constantly consider how they can set themselves and their organisation apart from the rest. Having a competitive edge and innovative offering is more important than even before.

Care

South Africans and foreigners alike were shaken to the core by the untimely passing and gruesome murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana. Shortly thereafter, the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, took time out during her visit to South Africa with Prince Harry to pay her respects at the young victim's memorial. The Duchess is deeply concerned about gender-based violence and [spent time](#) reflecting on the crisis and the impact thereof with representatives from ActionAid, the SA Medical Research Council, the Teddy Bear Clinic and Sonke Gender Justice. She also supported the recent launch of the [Uyinene](#)

Many have likened Meghan's level of care to that shown by her husband's late mother, Lady Diana. An uncaring leader will soon find themselves alone – remember that people leave leaders and not organisations. Showing true care switches people on and unlocks their discretionary effort – whether in business or the communities in which they serve.

Tenacity

Capitec's Gerrie Fourie was recently named [Business Leader of the Year](#) at the *Sunday Times* Top 100 awards. With a very tough year behind them – one that Gerrie admits was one of the “most trying” as CEO – Capitec has more than weathered the storm. Despite coming under attack from Viceroy regarding its loan practices and subsequently losing 25% of its share price, Capitec is well on its way to making its vision of servicing 95% of South Africa's banking clientele a reality.

Leaders today are faced with even more challenges than before, meaning that they must stay the course by remaining focused on why their organisation exists and their part in making it a success to the benefit of all.

Pioneering

Bill Gates is well known for being an innovative, big-picture thinker. He has recently revealed a “Solar Breakthrough” which will be even more environmentally friendly than traditional solar energy. Heliogen, which Bill Gates is a financial backer of, has [discovered a way](#) to use artificial intelligence and a field of mirrors to reflect so much sunlight that it generates extreme heat above 1,000 degrees Celsius. Essentially, the benefit is that carbon-free sunlight could potentially be used to manufacture cement, glass and steel, which traditionally uses carbon fuels.

If it wasn't for pioneers such as Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, the world would be a very different place. We would not have Microsoft, and might not yet have had fully-electric cars such as those produced by Tesla or a drive-through grocery store like AmazonFresh Pickup.

Pioneering is essential in a world where we are running out of resources – whether energy, minerals or time. Leaders need to be aware of the potential impact and opportunity associated with this, which requires serious big-picture thinking.

Passion

Everyone knows that show business is big business, but it is definitely not a quick and easy route to fame. At his first show in November 2009, with a crowd of only 10 people, Trevor Noah was just a start-up. Exactly 10 years later, he had a sold-out show in Madison Square Gardens and he has been nominated for a Grammy along with some of his biggest idols in the industry – Ellen Degeneres, Jim Gaffigan and Aziz Ansari.

If it wasn't for his absolute passion and dedication, Trevor would not have become a global household name – largely thanks

to his role on The Daily Show. Passionate leaders need to keep reinventing themselves while always remaining true to their purpose and ensuring that their personal brand speaks to that purpose. Some might say that leadership without passion is simply management.

Just imagine what the year and decade ahead could hold if leaders focused on being innovative, caring, tenacious, pioneering and passionate.

ABOUT BRIAN EAGAR

Brian Eagar is the founder and group CEO of TowerStone. From being voted as the naughtiest kid most likely to fail at school, Eagar found success in the information and technology sector as a young sales and marketing executive, culminating in an executive sales and strategy role for one of the Siemens businesses based in Germany. On his return to South Africa, his passion to inspire leadership led to the creation of TowerStone Leadership Centre in 2006.

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