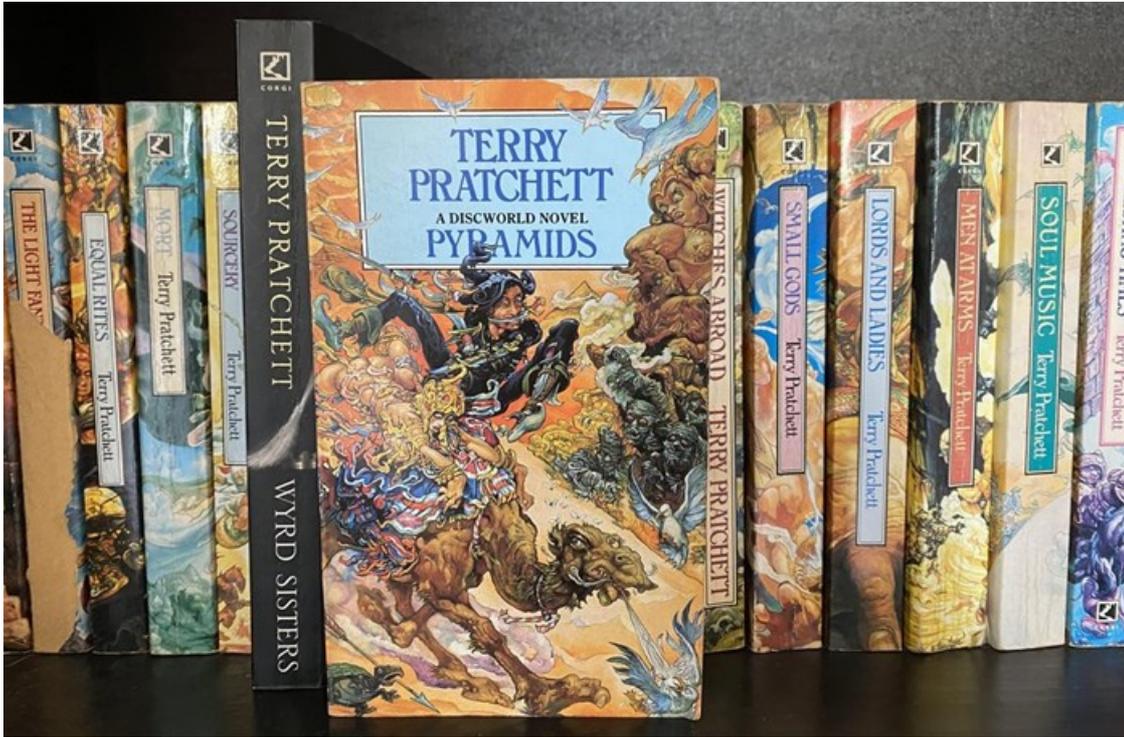


What pyramids can teach us about leadership, disruption, and succession

By Bronwyn Williams

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"You can go a long way with incompetent advisers." - Terry Pratchett



I recently hosted a salon for the Interintellect on the *Philosophy of Terry Pratchett*. One of the books we looked at was *Pyramids*, a satire that connects the ideas of pyramid schemes with the iconography of ancient Egypt. It also has some wonderful lessons on leadership.

Every advisor has an agenda

Firstly, when it comes to leadership, you should trust yourself more than you trust your consultants, advisors (or, as the case may be, your Grand Vizier). Most consultants have an agenda, most are trying to sell you a project or a piece of software off the back of their research and insight. Most of your advisors have their own agendas, such as their own career progression plans. Try to understand the hidden agendas behind the advice you are paying for. Always think for yourself if the advice being offered is in your best interests and in the best interests of your organisation.

Succession beats disruption

Secondly, when it comes to leadership, if you are trying to build a business or organisation that will *last* over the long run, getting succession right is more important than being 'disruptive'. Disruption as a strategy is an inherently short-term biased strategy, focused on the 'new' - that is emerging threats and opportunities.

Succession planning requires more foresight and focusing on what is important and lasting, not just what is urgent and exciting. Empires - both corporate and geopolitical - fall and fail because successions fail, if a king or a CEO is unable to hand over the reins to a worthy successor, the enterprise is all but doomed. The half lives of (even very big and successful) businesses are shrinking because all too many leaders prefer the immediate over the important.

Transformation also beats disruption

Third, although thinking about the long-game is underrated, that is no excuse to keep on doing what has always been done. While *some traditions are there for a reason*, many traditions serve no purpose and add no value. Your job as a leader is to know the difference. To do this, you need to ask the question why - and get an answer before discarding the things and practices that are holding you back *and retaining the ones that are providing you with foundational support*. (Simply 'doing things because we always did them this way' is not a good enough 'why'.)

Responsibility is knowing when to step up and when to step out

In other words, leadership requires stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for your business (or your kingdom) - and also knowing when to step down and hand over the reins to the next generation.

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