



MEDIA RELEASE

The Chameleon Leader – The Ultimate Change Manager

Monday April 2, 2012. Founder and principal of boutique leadership & team building consultancy Kameleons, Mr. Michael Peiniger said that animals have long been used as metaphors for human qualities for thousands of years to represent the leadership traits of loyalty, strength, decisiveness and purpose.

While these traits are still admirable in leaders, they do not fully represent the qualities that a modern leader must demonstrate in the workforce.

“Leaders today face unprecedented change, they need to sift and glean information from a variety of sources, as well as the ability to read both their internal and external environments and adapt as required,” said Michael Peiniger.

“With these requirements in mind, the bold, strong animal images of leadership no longer suffice and in fact the little known and often misunderstood chameleon possesses the required traits for the leaders of the future.”

Children’s cartoons would have you believe that the chameleon can change its body to any colour you can imagine, rendering it ‘invisible’ to all around it.

The truth is that several species of chameleon can adapt the colour of their skin to specific hues within their natural environment, responding to social cues, emotional change and danger in their surroundings.

Because of these traits, the chameleon can be viewed as the ultimate change manager.

Michael Peiniger continued, “The way many managers respond to change reminds me of cooking a lobster. If the change is sudden large and immediate (such as putting a lobster into boiling water), then the manager reacts like a lion; bold, direct and able to deal with the change head on.”

“If however, the change is more subtle (such as the lobster being immersed into cold water with the temperature rising slowly to a boil) the manager misses the required cues to change as needed. Just as the lobster cooks peacefully without recognising the slow change in temperature, many managers miss the required environmental cues to adapt to change.”

The chameleon’s ability to deal with change reflects how it can recognise and understand the subtle changes in its environment and change its colour accordingly.

Steven Jobs and Apple have demonstrated some excellent chameleon leadership traits.

Who knew that we needed or wanted an iPod or Ipad before they existed?

Apple had the ability to read the market before others and change its offering, or in the case of the iPad, provide a platform so attuned to its market that it overtook first entry options. Like a chameleon blending into its environment, Apple products blend and sync seamlessly together.

“Chameleon leaders are those that understand that success is not guaranteed in every leadership opportunity that is presented to them,” added Michael Peiniger.

“Leaders that behave like chameleons have a very clear understanding of what skills, behaviours and traits are their strengths, and place themselves in environments where those strengths can be used fully.”

Corporate history is filled with leaders that were successful in one company and not successful in others. These leaders did not understand the behaviours that made them successful in their chosen environment. Whereas chameleon leaders not only know their strengths, they know where they will best be employed.

Conversely, the chameleon leader knows what environments and skills are not in their skill set; they have a clear understanding of their innate weaknesses. So rather than trying to cover up, battle through or gloss over their weaknesses, chameleon leaders are open to what they cannot achieve and employ skilled people that demonstrate strength in their areas of weakness.

It is not just the ability to change colour that makes the chameleon such an amazing leader through change.

The chameleon has the most distinctive eyes of any reptile and can rotate and focus independently, resulting in the ability to observe two different objects simultaneously providing a full 360-degree view around its body.

Not only can the chameleon leader multi-task skilfully, they scan their environment (both internally and externally) and keep up to date with current information.

When needed, the chameleon can focus those independent eyes together resulting in amazing depth perception and vision. A chameleon leader demonstrates the ability to focus keenly on an individual task, being able to break a task down to its component pieces for improvement.

Michael Peiniger is often asked, “Why do businesses need chameleon leaders in their workplace?” His response is –

“Most often they are the people that aren’t afraid to question the status quo and are willing to change a process to fit a current setting. They may not be at the head of the pack like a lion shouting out their virtues; they are right in front of you, blending into the corporate environment and making changes you haven’t seen, going about their tasks without fanfare”

“Not recognising their strengths and abilities could be fatal in an environment of constant change and seemingly endless communication. Take the time to find the chameleon leaders and then embrace their unique skill sets. After all, would you rather be working with lobsters?”

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Notes to the editor: About Michael Peiniger

Michael Peiniger is the founder of Kameleons, a boutique leadership & team building consultancy committed to providing businesses and individuals with the expertise and solutions that they need to succeed in today's ever changing work environment.

Passionate about leadership and the need for businesses to harness individuals', Michael develops the natural skills of individuals so that they can fulfil their full potential.

Michael has a broad professional background that includes leadership and team facilitation, leadership course design, management consulting, change management and senior manager coaching and development.

Key skills include his ability to weave complex leadership theories and the strategic 'big picture' into simple and practical leadership solutions through his honest, direct and results oriented style.

Michael's career began with Royal Australian Air Force where he succeeded in a wide variety of challenging roles, including an exchange with the Royal Air Force in Scotland.

During his defence career, Michael won the prestigious Air Force Association leadership sword in 1998 and progressed to the rank of Squadron Leader ahead of his peers.

As the senior instructor at the Air Force Officers' Training School, Michael trained more than 1500 junior officers to meet the demanding requirements of leadership and adaptation to change that is required of a leader in the dynamic military environment.

Since leaving the Air Force, Michael has used his extensive leadership and management experience to provide tailored leadership consultancy services and dynamic facilitation for a wide variety of organisations. These include:

APIA
Australian Unity
City West Water
Fosters Group
Jetstar
The Laminex Group

Lonely Planet Publications
The Meinhardt Group
Sensis
Shannons Insurance
realestate.com
Victorian Workcover Authority.

Michael holds a Master of Business Administration (HR / Leadership) and a Bachelor of Physics. He is a Fellow of the Institute for Learning Practitioners and holds a Diploma in Assessment & Training Systems as well as the Certificate IV in Training & Assessment.