

# Foreword

It happens again and again. Bright, aggressive managers move quickly up an organization and then, quite suddenly, find themselves becalmed. The skills that seemed to be serving them so well are just not enough. We have all seen the heads shake. He, or she, is “*not very good with people*” or “*doesn’t seem able to see the wood for the trees*” or “*is not very good at lateral thinking.*”

We know what this really means. They may be great, but somehow they are not quite leaders. Someone once said that there are actually three kinds of people: leaf people who just see leaves, tree people who see leaves and trees, and far more rarely, forest people who understand that leaves and trees make up forests and that forests are very different.

Julia is a forest person. And her book is about what makes forest people, why they matter more than ever, and what it takes to become one. Of course, such people are as old as time. How did Hannibal lead so many people – and elephants – over such long distances without even one laptop to help him? What made Wilberforce able to persuade so many thousands that slavery was not simply morally odious, but that it should be abolished? Why has Nelson Mandela not exacted terrible revenge from those who imprisoned him? How come John Lewis had an idea for a “non-capitalist” company that still works today – in the most intensely competitive environment we have ever seen?

This book is about what makes this kind of leader. For the last 17 years, Common Purpose has been a kind of laboratory in which Julia, like some marvelous alchemist, has been instrumental in identifying and helping to inspire all kinds of people whose authority comes from *them*, not just from what they *do*.

Perhaps the image of the alchemist is not so far-fetched. Really excellent leadership does have a magical element. But Julia is far too hard-headed to take refuge in magic. The enormous success of Common Purpose is that it is based on the proven fact that real lead-

ers – however different their personalities, however diverse their backgrounds – who all see the same situation at the same time will come to recognize how much they have *in common and* how, together, they can start to change things.

In Julia's world, there is not much room for ideology as an end in itself. Her ideal leaders, like her, are pragmatic, able to forge alliances, good at creating and operating networks. Because their authority comes in part from their personality, they don't feel the need obviously to dominate; they are not at all bad at leading from behind. Anyone who has seen Julia at work will have seen the elliptical way in which she works as a leader and how often the conclusion is the one she wanted right at the start.

I recall one meeting, chaired by Julia, which I was convinced was going to go nowhere. And yet a very disparate group of people arrived at the same conclusion almost without realizing who had got them there.

Years ago, this was sometimes called "natural" authority. Julia has it in abundance and knows it is a skill that is more in demand than ever, and it is one that can be taught and refined, as she shows in this book. Perhaps it is not entirely a coincidence that Common Purpose's success has coincided with what is sometimes called the end of ideology. The old "oughts," the old "isms" made a certain, directive leadership style much easier.

Now the battle lines are anything but clear. Alliances form around issues and then re-form around others. The distinction between private and public sector, for example, is now blurred in almost every area, from health care to prisons, in ways which would have seemed inconceivable 20 years ago.

Julia saw early on that these lines were blurring, and Common Purpose is magnificent testimony to her prescience. Like her, these new kinds of leader refuse to accept that they should stay "in their box," stick to what they know. 2009 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, one of the greatest thinkers of all time. The striking thing about him was that he did not recognize boundaries; he just went where his research took him. The result was an amazing, integrated whole even though, by today's standards, he had none of the "qualifications" which are now thought to be a prerequisite for authority. Julia's leaders also have this confidence, the authority to go where the issue takes them.

I have worked with Julia for a lot of the 17 years that she has "been" Common Purpose. During that time many thousands of

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people have been on its programs. They can't all be Wilberforce or John Lewis. But you only have to attend a gathering of Common Purpose "graduates" to see that they are not "ordinary" leaders either. Julia is fonder of "citizens" – a word which can sometimes conjure up the Scarlet Pimpernel and all those citizens gathered at the foot of the guillotine. But, for her, citizenship by itself implies very clear and very important leadership responsibilities. Or, as John Kennedy put it: there are those who ask why and then there are those who ask why not? There is no greater tribute than to say that Julia, magnificently, is one of the latter.

Sir David Bell  
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