

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **GARY BURNISON**

Believe to Achieve

Many years ago, a ship out in the middle of the ocean was rocked by a fierce storm—and everyone had to abandon ship. After countless days in a small life raft, the captain finally stood on the beach of a deserted island, surrounded by 10 other people—wet, cold and scared.

To rally everyone, the captain told them that they would be rescued. In the meantime, though, the priorities were shelter, fire and food. People began to work together in small groups—and they began to believe.

The captain climbed a hill above the beach to search the horizon for signs of a rescue. Instead, the captain saw at least 10 more life rafts being carried toward the island by the tide. "We're going to have company," the captain called out to the others. "Soon, there will be one hundred or so people on this beach—and they need our help."

"Lucky for them, you're here to take charge," someone called out from the group, and many others nodded.

"No," said the captain. "That's not going to work. There will be too many for one person to lead directly. I need each of you to meet one life raft and help those people for the next few days until we get rescued."

The group didn't look happy. "How are we going to do that?" they asked.

"The same way I did," the captain explained. "It's not that difficult—reassure them about their future, help them understand what needs to be done now."



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"So... what will you be doing?" another person asked.

The captain gave a reassuring smile. "It's my job to help each of you become the leader that your team needs."

The captain's fable, which was shared with me by a colleague a few years ago, always reminds me of the importance of the ABCs of leadership: *Accountability, Belief* and *Capability*.

ACCOUNTABILITY. When most people think about accountability, they look through the lens of how accountable others are to them. The truth is we first need to look in the mirror—at who we are and how we act. In other words, we must first be accountable to ourselves for our own behaviors. Then when we desire peace, we act with peace. When we value truth, we uphold it. When we feel compassion, we show it.

BELIEF. When we believe we can make a difference—that change is possible—our actions will follow. This is what leadership is all about: inspiring others to believe and enabling that belief to become reality. And when others are discouraged, disappointed, or drowning in doubt—that's when our willingness to believe changes everything. Uncertainty turns into confidence, ambivalence into motivation, and can't into can.

CAPABILITY. This is a broad brush: listening, caring, connecting, inspiring, expanding, exploring, and learning. The more we grow, the more we can become the leaders others need us to be. And if we need encouragement, all we need to do is look back on how far we've come. That's when we can appreciate more fully just how capable we've become.

The tide is changing—and the life rafts are coming in. So, what will we do?

It's time to choose accountability for who we are, and to showcase the capabilities we bring. The real gamechanger, though, is belief.

In life and leadership, we all have stories of people who helped us face our fears, overcome our doubts, and enliven our spirits. Early in my days as a CEO, there was the board member who took the time to mentor me, saying: "I don't just want you to be successful—I am going to ensure that you are successful."

But, if we're honest, how often do we really go back and reflect on those times and those people who truly believed? More to the point, how often do we embody those beliefs for others?

Belief is symbiotic, with mutual respect and understanding on both sides. Everyone has their own truth, and leadership is taking that self-truth and making it shared truth. Not just believing *in* people but believing *for* them and *with* them.

To be a leader, we walk with others—occasionally in front, sometimes behind, and always by their side. Because people may not remember what we tell them, but they will remember whether we believed in them.

For more career advice, read Burnison's latest book, **I Need a Job!**

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**