

Zoom On: Dr. Paul Ballman



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Dr. Paul Ballman is Head of Leadership Development at Vodafone UK and the author of [Red Pill: The Truth About Leadership](#).

1. What are your key areas of interest and research?

I am principally a practitioner in the area of leadership excellence, so that tends to drive my research interest. Much of my consulting work involves psychologically profiling candidates for the leadership roles in the world's biggest businesses. However, this then leads to coaching them in place, helping them build the right team around them and eventually the right organisation. Inevitably, understanding what it takes to be a great leader involves also understanding what it takes to create a great organisation.

2. What are the major challenges in your field?

The continual change and complexity of organisations makes identifying what makes for effectiveness extremely hard. Just when you think that you have found the formula for success, a competitor copies it, a legislation changes or a market collapses. True, there are some basic leadership principles that appear to increase your chances of doing well, but they don't guarantee results and, even worse, sometimes people who ignore them still do well. The net result of this is that countless books have been written that study the greatest leaders and organisations of our time, only to find out that these shining examples had feet of clay.

3. What is your top management tip?

Be the leader that you want to be and be it brilliantly. Don't try and be different to your own beliefs because you think you have to in order to get on. You won't do it well and it really is no guarantee of success. Instead try being an ever better version of yourself using large amounts of feedback.

4. What would you single out as a career highlight?

Over a period of years I built up a global network of offices in the psychological consultancy that I led. To set them up and running required lots of travel, finding brilliant people and giving them the coaching and confidence to lead their own businesses. We would connect regularly in an international video-conference. I clearly remember conducting one such conference for the Asia-Pacific region at 5 am UK time, sat in my kitchen. I had been due to miss the meeting so one of the office leads was prepped to lead the session and, feeling groggy, I let him do so even though I was there in the end. Through the whole meeting I didn't need to say a word - they were thriving without me.

5. If you had not chosen this career path, what would you have become?

Well, I didn't really choose this career path, somehow it seemed to choose me and I am very glad it did. This field allows me to express myself

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with originality, so any alternative would have to allow that. As a boy I loved dance and idolised Gene Kelly, so maybe I would have put in the hours of practice required to make a career of that.

6. What are your personal interests outside of work?

With sons aged 7 and 9, inevitably much of it revolves around them. As they get older it is wonderful to develop common interests with them and I was delighted when the Rugby World Cup sparked their interest. If I ever do have a moment alone, it will involve me holding a book.

7. Your favourite quote?

One of my weaknesses as a leader is that I am a little too understanding and reasonable, so I twist myself out of shape to accommodate others and to understand the barriers they face. I know that at times I need to be more stubborn and unreasonable in order to get stuff done. So, for many years I carried around this quote from George Bernard Shaw:

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

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