

Character and behaviour

The character and behaviour of our leaders defines who we are as a nation. It's time to raise our game to a standard of which we can be genuinely proud



Lead by example



Listen with an open mind



Be kind and compassionate



Respect others

In the run up to any election, the airwaves are filled with kneejerk criticisms of political opponents, occasionally intermingled with soundbite promises designed to woo voters in marginal electorates. The more serious candidates produce proper campaign manifestos, filled with details as to what they plan to do, and with luck a sensible plan as to how they will meet the cost of their ambitions.

Either way, around the world, politics is becoming more and more volatile. In Australia, the influence of the larger political parties is waning, and smaller parties and independent candidates are slowly but steadily gaining traction. Both of these factors increase the importance of understanding how leaders will respond to changing circumstances, and how they may seek to negotiate a bipartite or multi-partite solution.

Never mind the often-hollow promises. What is the character of the would-be leader in question, and how will they behave in adversity?

Another worrying trend is the tendency of political leaders to respond to difficult problems by turning away from both economic and scientific objectivity. Often arguments are put forward in terms that play well in ninety seconds on the evening news, but bear very little scrutiny in the morning. Whilst tempting in the short term, this approach almost always comes back to bite the proponent, as their lack of analysis highlights both slap-dash economic laziness as well as a lack of true care to resolve to issue in question.

Meanwhile, overseas senior figures who should know much better have shamelessly lied their way to public influence, political power, and in some cases significant personal financial gain. The rise of social media, originally a force for greater transparency, has been turned against itself by bot armies and micro-targeted advertising campaigns, in part orchestrated and funded by State actors.

Shockingly, Orwell's 1984 turns out to be little more than kindergarten-level dystopia.



This brings us to the behavior of Australia's politicians when they face each other across the chamber, as this is where the negotiations will be thrashed out. Having followed the country's politics for some fifteen years, I am yet to hear anyone of any political persuasion outside Canberra who is impressed with what they see. Far from it – too often what we witness in Australia's houses of parliament would see a six-year-old sent to the naughty corner for some well-deserved cool-down time. In business, employees who behaved this way would be disciplined and – if they did not change their ways – most likely summarily fired for cause.

We should all expect much, much better from our elected leaders, as indeed our better leaders do themselves.

First, there's widespread support for a federal independent commission against corruption. This should be introduced forthwith, with wide-ranging powers and solid long-term funding.

Secondly, I call for every political party and each independent candidate to support a simple Community Leader's Code of Conduct, to rule policy development, political debate and general standards of behaviour at every level of government. Let's bring an end to hypocrisy, bigotry and bullying and set a standard that we can be genuinely proud of as a nation.



The best leaders are remembered for what they achieved, the worst leaders for what they failed to deliver



Treat each other with respect! Let's get rid of all the ugliness, end the schoolyard insults and bully-boy tactics, and bring more decency back into political life. This will elevate the business of government to a place where the people once again respect every one of their political leaders.



Answer the question! Let's insist that our leaders face facts, and answer reasonable questions as honestly as they can, rather than grasping for short term spin. This will reinforce a sense of honesty and start to rebuild so much of the trust that has been broken.



Respect science! Let's stop favouring political rhetoric and backroom chatter over informed analysis, scientific rigour and plain, down-to-earth knowledge. Willful ignorance is not tolerated in business and has no place in professionally run country, so let's stamp it out wherever it raises its ugly head.



Listen to the bureaucrats! Let's urge every political representative to make the most of the accumulated practical knowledge and experience of professional bureaucrats. This will reduce the huge amount of time wasted in ill-considered policy red herrings and rebuild confidence in politicians ability to deliver on their promises.



Remember that actions speak louder than words! Let's remind everyone that the best leaders are remembered for what they achieved, and the worst leaders are remembered for what they promised. In other words, what you do will define your legacy, whether you like it or not.

To add teeth to this simple code, let's introduce a "Goose and Gander" law that states simply that what's fit for politicians is also fit for individuals and businesses, whether in relation to liability at law or liability for tax. This would focus minds on the example that they are setting and would address head on the perception that there's one law for the lawmakers, and another for everyone else.