

The Leadership You're Not Seeing

Most businesses are surrounded by leadership talent they're not seeing. Not because it's hidden. Because they're looking in the wrong places.

We've been conditioned to look for leadership in a very narrow set of places. Job titles. Seniority. The person who speaks most confidently in a room. The one who puts their hand up for every new initiative. The one who's done the MBA or been on the expensive leadership programme.

And so we promote that person. We give them the team. We send them on the course. We call them a leader because they tick the boxes we've been taught to look for.

Meanwhile, some of the most natural leaders in the building are sitting in roles nobody associates with leadership at all. The junior who calms the team down when a project goes sideways. The ops person everyone gravitates towards when they need honest advice. The account manager whose clients would follow them to a competitor without hesitation, not because of what they sell, but because of who they are.

These people don't look like leaders in the traditional sense. They haven't been on the course. They're not the loudest. They probably haven't asked for a promotion. But they're doing the thing that matters most: they're making the people around them better.

When I ask a room full of business owners to think of a really great leader, someone who genuinely shaped them, they almost never name a CEO or a board member. They name a teacher. A coach. A first boss who took a chance on them. A grandparent who ran a shop. People whose leadership had nothing to do with status and everything to do with how they made others feel.

If you're a founder building a business in the £2m-£50m range, the question isn't whether you have leaders inside your business. You do. The question is whether you're seeing them. Because if you're only looking where you've been trained to look, you're missing the people who could transform your team from the inside out.

This isn't soft thinking. It's commercial thinking. A business with depth of leadership is a business that runs when the founder isn't there. It's a business that retains its best people. It's a business that someone wants to buy.

I've spent the last two years exploring what actually makes leaders land on people, and it's almost never what we've been taught to look for. My keynote 'Dare to Be Different' unpacks this in a way that changes how business owners think about their teams. If you're organising an event for founders, leadership teams, or business owners, I'd love to have a conversation about whether it's the right fit.

Unconventional by nature. Commercial by necessity.
matt@mattgarman.com · mattgarman.com · Brighton, UK