

The
Economist

Schumpeter

The angel and the monster

Mother Teresa and Lady Gaga are the latest icons of the leadership industry. Don't laugh

Jun 2nd 2011 | from the print edition

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THERE are obvious differences, of course. Lady Gaga's raw-meat dress would probably not have appealed to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The pop star's habit of changing from one bizarre costume to another several times a day, and maybe 20 times during a gig, might have struck the late nun as extravagant. Mother Teresa wore the same outfit every day: a white sari with three blue stripes, reflecting her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Lady Gaga, by contrast, is not big on chastity. ("Baby when it's love if it's not rough it isn't fun," she sings.)



Yet the differences between the two women may matter less than their similarities. Both are venerated. Mother Teresa built her Missionaries of Charity from nothing into a global operation with fingers in over 100 countries. Lady Gaga is forecast to earn over \$100m in 2011 and may soon outstrip supergroups like U2. Both women are also role models for corporate leaders, according to two recent publications, "Mother Teresa, CEO", a book by two executives, Ruma Bose and Lou Faust, and "Lady Gaga: Born This Way?", a case study by Jamie Anderson and Jörg Reckhenrich of Antwerp Management School and Martin Kupp of the European School of Management and Technology.

It is not just that, early in their careers, they traded in long, barely-pronounceable names for catchy short ones: Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu became Mother Teresa, Stefani Germanotta became Lady Gaga. As the two publications argue, both women succeeded by developing simple, clear brands, which coincidentally both identified with outsiders. Mother Teresa ministered to the poor and the sick: people "shunned by everyone". Lady Gaga describes herself as "a freak, a maverick, a lost soul looking for peers". She assures her fans that it is OK to be odd. This is a comforting message not only for gays but also for most teenagers.

Hard work helped both women excel. Mother Teresa rose every day at 4.40am for mass. Lady Gaga "will take Christmas Day off—and spend it with her parents—but otherwise she works non-stop." Brilliant communication helped even more. Mother Teresa was a "PR machine" who, whether talking to a dying leper or a rich donor, "always left her imprint by communicating in a language the other person understood". Lady Gaga is "one of the first pop stars to have truly built her career through the internet and social media."

Lady Gaga has what Messrs Anderson, Kupp and Reckhenrich call "leadership projection" and a layman would call charisma. The authors think this is because she tells "three universal stories". First, a personal story: who am I? (She stresses that she was the weird kid at school, but driven to be creative.) Second, a group narrative: who are we? (She calls her fans "my little monsters" and herself "Mama Monster", and she communicates with them constantly via Facebook and Twitter.) And third, a collective mission: where are we going? (She promotes gay rights and celebrates self-expression; she tells her fans that together they can

change the world.)

Lady Gaga has the “ability to build emotional commitment” in those she leads, says Mr Reckhenrich. This ability is increasingly valuable in today’s business world, he believes. In “The Fine Art of Success”, a book he and his co-authors released last year, they examine it at length. They are now working with Egon Zehnder, an executive-recruitment firm, to figure out how to identify whether candidates for top corporate jobs have the ability to “project leadership” the way Lady Gaga does.

One risk of this leadership style is that “telling a personal story opens you up to personal attack,” admits Mr Reckhenrich. Lady Gaga has been accused of lacking authenticity, and a dull, literal judge would no doubt find her guilty. Her new album cover depicts her as half-woman and half-motorbike, and claims that she was “Born this Way”. This is obviously not true. However, to accuse an artist of artifice is a bit like accusing a banker of being interested in money: it may be true, but it is still trite.

Mother Teresa had her critics, too. Christopher Hitchens, a polemical atheist, called her “Hell’s Angel”. In his book, “The Missionary Position”, he berated her for spreading an extreme form of Catholicism and for accepting money from dodgy people such as “Papa Doc” Duvalier, the late dictator of Haiti.

The mystery of charisma

Management tracts with famous names in the titles are mostly guff. There is only so much a manager can learn from Genghis Khan—it is no longer practical to impale competitors on spikes. Likewise, sceptics may doubt that the secrets of Lady Gaga’s success, or Mother Teresa’s, can usefully be applied to, say, a company that makes ball-bearings. A manager who calls her minions “little monsters” will probably not win their hearts. A boss who declares that God wants the sales team to meet its targets will be laughed at. Sceptics might also point out that Lady Gaga is not much of a manager. Her recent world tour attracted legions of fans but still lost money, because she kept changing the sets.

Yet charisma matters in business, and celebrities do tell us something about how it can be wielded. It is no longer enough for a corporate boss to be clever and good at giving orders. Modern knowledge workers may not put up with a hard, old-fashioned boss like Jack Welch, who used to run General Electric. Many respond better to one who communicates warmly: Indra Nooyi of PepsiCo sometimes writes to the parents of her managers to thank them for bringing up such fine children. Employees crave a sense of purpose, and the boss who can supply it will get the best out of them. Personal stories help: Steve Jobs and Richard Branson, whose business empires depend on their charisma, both play up their pasts as educational dropouts. Charisma is tough to learn, but it is not gaga to seek guidance in the stars.

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