

Don't lead like Ceausescu – or like Mike Ashley

As we near the new school year, LES WALTON highlights a few bear traps for first-time headteachers (and first-time education secretaries)

ROMANIAN president Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena were shot in 1989 by a firing squad after a secret military tribunal found them both guilty of crimes against the state.

A stunned reaction from the public gave way to scenes of delight and a public outpouring on the streets to celebrate. But there was some unrest from troops who supported the former leader.

There is a story about Ceausescu which may or not be true. The story goes that he used to dress in workmen's clothes and walk about Romania asking people what they thought of Ceausescu the President.

Usually the answer was "we are not prepared to say because the secret police may overhear".

Eventually he met a man who was prepared to tell him what he really thought. "I will only tell you if we can meet away from the city, in the middle of the countryside, with no one able to hear my answer." Ceausescu followed the man in a separate car and eventually arrived in a clearing in the middle of a forest in the middle of nowhere.

"Well what do you think of him?" asked the President. The man looked furtively around and then whispered in his ear... "Actually I quite like him".

Within a couple of weeks we are about to start a new term. We now have a new Secretary of State Nicky Morgan. We will also have new headteachers.

Please don't get me wrong. I am certainly not comparing the above mentioned to Nicolae Ceausescu. Nor am I going to comment on the leadership of our new Secretary of State or any new headteacher. It is too early.

However, we have leaders who have been around for a while, who are known to the region... Mike Ashley, the owner of Newcastle United and Alan Pardew, the manager. Please bear with me. This article is about education, football is simply a 'visual aid'.

At the last meeting of NUFC Anonymous, held in our pub every Friday night, I heard myself declaring, "I quite like Mike Ashley".

I have been a Newcastle supporter, ever since the age of nine, when my father passed me over the heads of other supporters so I could stand at the front of the crowd. (I also want to state that my father did not continue the practice when I became a teenager.)

The one thing I like about Mike Ashley is that he has stopped the silly practice of buying expensive 'trophy



➤ Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley embraces his affiliative style of leadership back in 2007. But it wasn't to last

footballers. I believe his purchasing strategy is much better than previous owners. There - I have said it!

I believe the tragedy of owners such as Mike Ashley - and I include Alan Pardew in this category - is not how they manage Newcastle United, but how they lead the club.

Being loved or not by supporters or staff does not provide a full insight on how someone may be leading an organisation.

Many years ago I was training headteachers in the sublime art of leadership. One headteacher arrived late. He announced everyone on his staff loved him and always agreed with him. This headteacher later discovered that they did indeed love him. However they always agreed with him, not because he was right, but because they didn't want to upset such a nice man. I called it 'sunshine management'. "You will do it, sunshine, won't you?"

In July I was leading a similar programme with a school leadership team. We were discussing various styles of leadership:

- Coercive - gives lots of directives and tells people what to do;
- Authoritative - develops and articulates a clear vision for the organisation;
- Affiliative - promotes friendly interaction and stresses things to keep people happy;
- Democratic - trusts people to have the capability to develop the appropriate direction for themselves and their organisation;
- Pacesetter - leads by example or 'modelling' and is apprehensive about delegating;
- Coaching - helps people to identify their unique strengths and weakness in the light of their aspirations.

When we apply this analysis to Mike Ashley we can see immediately that he did start with an affiliative style, sitting in the local pubs with the local supporters.

However, the leader that is limited to focusing on friendly interaction and trusts people to set their own direction will eventually fail.

And if the leader is simply coercive and pacesetter, they will also eventually fail. She or he will achieve quick wins over a short period of time then things will start to fall apart. (Romanian dictators please note.)

In my view the biggest failure of Mike Ashley and Alan Pardew is that they have failed to demonstrate the full range of leadership styles necessary to really renew Newcastle United.

Most of all they have failed to develop a shared vision of transformation for Newcastle United. A vision which we all understand and can sign up to. Great leaders cannot transform an organisation simply on friendly interaction or being coercive.

We start a new term with a new Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan. Some schools will be starting with new headteachers.

Quite simply my plea is for them to be leaders, but leaders who give clear directions, set the pace, promote social harmony, listen to experts, help people to self-improve and, most of all, create a shared vision for the transformation of our children's lives.

As parents, teachers, employers, we want to know the direction in which the education system or our school is heading - and also what it will look like when it is transformed.