

# Leadership from Within

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Horizons

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Effective leadership is instantly recognizable by those who are being touched by it. When a leader is acting with common sense, a certain grace, and deep intelligence people who are being led are feeling calm, certain, and confident. There is humor, faith in the chosen direction, a willingness to pitch in, and the recognition that the hard work no longer seems difficult.

All of us have experienced moments like this, but they seem to be exceptional rather than commonplace. Often people remark that they were lucky to have been part of something unique. There is the unspoken thought that they may never have it again. Even the leader may be somewhat awestruck and unable to explain what happened, much less replicate it.

If competent leadership is that obvious, then why does it seem so elusive? Is it because we are trying to catch a butterfly, and the instant we do the beauty and elegance of its flight disappears?

Leading may be like living. The moment we try to capture it, define it, or give it form as "leadership" its essential grace takes flight. Perhaps, this is why so much has been written about it with so little effect on improving the quality of leadership in institutions of all kinds.

Great leaders instinctively know this. They do not attempt to explain their leadership any more than a great artist puts his artistry into words or a great athlete dissects her superhuman feat. The act, like the art or the accomplishment, speaks for itself. But suppose, for a moment, that there is a common denominator behind the artist, the

leader, and the athlete. What can we point to that links them together?

For one thing, they all would say that their moments of inspired action came to them seemingly without their conscious direction. “Just do it” comes to mind. They often point to time slowing down giving them the chance to see things with complete clarity. Sometimes they describe being an observer viewing themselves distant from their actions almost as if they were having an out of body experience. They call this “being in the zone”.

For another thing, they often mention deep and profound feelings of joy, peace, warmth, compassion or gratitude. It is remarkable that these emotions seem independent of the stamina that was required, the desperation of the situation they faced, or the physical properties of the material they used.

The Dhammapada captures this wonderfully:

“Let us live in joy, never hating those who hate us, never attached among those who are selfishly attached, never hoarding things among those who hoard. There is no fire like lust, no sickness like hatred, no sorrow like separateness, no joy like peace. No disease is worse than greed, no suffering worse than selfish passion.”

The fact that they did not have to “think” about their actions or feelings during the moment of action does not mean that they were not “thinking”. Thought is the universal experience of life. It is another common denominator for the leader, artist, and athlete.

Perhaps it is **the** thing that links their actions for, as Buddha said, “we are what we think; with our thoughts we create the world”. What he is pointing to is the universal fact that our reality arises from our thinking. In other words, what is on our minds, is what looks real to us.

## Leading from the Inside

People forget this basic condition of our existence. We all know that we think, but we sometimes lose sight of the fact that it is our thinking that creates our reality.

Most people assume that reality is something that exists outside of them. For example, one hears most frequently the lament about how fast the pace has become; the phrase “Internet time” is instantly recognizable. But is it really the internet that has speeded up time or is it our busy minds that have made things seem fast paced to us?

The feelings one has about time might be more a question of one’s state of mind than the state of time. If someone is thinking about how little time they have, how much they have to do before the next meeting, or how they will meet a looming a deadline, then this person may be very short tempered and feel stressed out.

But this is hardly the way time looks to high school kids. Do you remember sitting in class having the feeling that time is barely passing as you wait for the 3:00 p.m. bell? They are more likely to be bored to death or fidgeting as they watch the hands crawl across the face of the clock.

Michael Jordan, in what would be his final championship game, stole the ball from his opponent with mere seconds to go and his team down by one point. In his own words, “the instant seemed to unfold slowly, with great clarity. I never doubted myself.”. Time appeared more infinite since he was thinking that they would win the game. These thoughts produced the feelings of confidence and serenity.

One concludes from these example that time is neutral and not the cause of how we feel. It does not care about our deadlines, anxiousness to get out of class, or the score of the game. Rather, what gives meaning to time is what we are thinking about; what is on our

minds. These thoughts come to life as a feeling that seems real. These feelings then prompt our actions.

So the executive who is tense and snaps at subordinates, the schoolgirl who is bored and tries to tease her friend, and the athlete who is calm and sees how to score are all acting consistent with their thoughts. If they were to change what was on their minds, their actions would change as well. Our realities are our thoughts come to life via our feelings.

If we are thinking peaceful thoughts, life looks tranquil and our actions measured. If we are thinking about how we look to others, life can seem like a race we cannot win and our actions will be self-aggrandizing. If our thoughts are worried, life seems to present an unending stream of things to be worried about and our actions will be distracted.

As humans, we have been given a wonderful gift -- the power to change our thoughts. The moment we change our thinking our reality shifts. We are the thinker of our thoughts! It is our thoughts that create our separate realities.

Edwin Moses, the world's best hurdler, knew this about himself. Occasionally he would become so concerned about a race that he would feel physically ill beforehand. But when these feelings crept up on him, he found that he could consciously clear his mind either by putting this anxiety out of his thoughts or by not paying attention to it. As he let go he relaxed mentally. In this more peaceful mental state he found the confidence and joy to perform well. Moses retired from racing with five Olympic gold medals, never having lost a single competition.

### **Taking a Business Example**

Consider the leader who is faced with an under-performing business and calls a meeting of the top four or five people responsible for

running it. A typical pattern might be for this person to have analyzed the problem and come up with several solutions beforehand. He or she is thinking about the best way to “sell” these ideas to the other managers.

When the meeting begins the leader senses resistance. There is a certain tension in the room. It is likely that the others know something significant is at stake and they may be fearful of the outcome, worried about it, or even angry. If the leader is really convinced that his or her answers are the right ones, they may add fuel to the negativity by becoming overly strident or even autocratic.

The tone of the meeting goes downhill. It feels as though the group is mired in mud and progress is difficult and slow. Those fearful thoughts caused people to react defensively to suggestions, the angry ones have lead to arguments over even trivial points, and the worry has lead to concerns about why event the simplest changes would never work out. The leader, being committed to an answer, may become more and more assertive slipping over the line from “selling” to “telling”. That in itself may have contributed to the rockiness of the session.

As the meeting adjourns, people are spent. At best the leader gets only a portion of his or her answer having traded away elements in order to have the managers “buy into it”. But everyone knows that peoples’ hearts are not really behind the outcome and the journey looks difficult since resistance will come up again and again.

Sound familiar? No doubt that we have all been in too many meetings like this one!

Now if that leader understood the role of thought in life, things might have turned out very differently. First of all he or she would have been mindful of how their own thinking creates their reality. In order to have a productive session they may have spent a few moments clearing their minds by thinking about how appreciative they are of everyone’s efforts in trying times, how people are doing

the best they can in light of how they think about things, or how people can rise to the occasion.

The leader would have known better than to become too wedded to an answer himself or herself. Not only might this prevent him or her from listening deeply enough to everyone else, but also it is easy for the group to begin analyzing things rather than exploring their situation and developing the common ground necessary for permanent solutions. So the leader would have prepared by framing the most important questions for the group to consider collectively.... Something along the lines of “what do we need to do to lift the performance of this business?”.

The leader would be attuned to the mood in the room. The “tone” points to what is on everyone’s minds. Sensing the fear, anger, or anxiousness, the leader would openly express his or her compassion, warmth and respect for each person.

People would see the leader’s calmness, curiosity, and hope. These feelings are so obvious that people instantly connect to it. Often the mere recognition has a calming effect because positive feelings are contagious. The session would begin with a sense of possibility and hope.

As the mood lightened, the leader would have begun exploring the key questions, looking for everyone to contribute their own insights. These insights would be fresh and innovative because they are coming from people’s inner wisdom. Their common sense would be accessible because thoughts of worry, distraction, or hopelessness are not crowding out their creativity.

Not only would the meeting take less time, but the sense of forward progress would have been tangible. The managers and leader alike would be committed to the new direction since everyone’s fingerprints would be on it. If one person were going to be adversely impacted the group might well have taken this on directly. Even though this individual may not like the outcome they could not help

but be touched by the concern and support coming from their peers or the intrinsic common sense of the decisions.

Same situation, same set of facts, but very different outcomes. Not only did the leader work much less hard during the latter session, but also he or she knows that forward progress will happen more easily as the managers take actions that would be consistent with the decisions and agreements that were made.

The proof that thought is causal would come from how the business performs and the spirit of the employees. If the team understands how their own thinking creates their reality, then a hopeful, positive view of their circumstances, no matter how bleak the results, will, in time, lead to the decisions and actions consistent with stronger performance. A certain ease and grace would prevail among everyone allowing them to do their best without being distracted by the external circumstances.

It is not a question of positive thoughts creating better performance by themselves, but more a truth that they signify an ascending consciousness. A quiet and calm mind is more deeply in touch with its own wisdom. It is this innate intelligence, beyond what we can analyze or can learn about from books, that enables one to lead with surefootedness no matter what the circumstances.

Before we understood thought at Gunn Partners our semi annual firm days would begin on a tense and unsettling note. We are a virtual firm with people living all over the globe so understandably we would all have different agendas, concerns, or worries. This thinking made it hard to listen to one another and inevitably led to rocky sessions at first. Now that we see how thought affects our feelings, not only do people not take their own thinking so seriously, but also we look towards appreciation and gratitude as a way of coming together more peacefully.

We find that we are able to accomplish our meeting work and take whatever decisions are needed in three or four hours each day

allowing everyone to do some one on one work or just enjoy each other's company. And the responses to the survey question, "are you glad you came to Firm Day?" have gone from a high rating of 2.5 (on a 1 to 5 scale) to 1.2.

## **Trusting Your Wisdom**

Wisdom and common sense are always just a "thought away" for all of us. And they are the essence of leading (as well as living) with uncommon grace and ease. Trusting that your own wisdom will provide the answers you seek takes a leap of faith. It is something that cannot be taught since each of us have to discover it for ourselves.

Webster's defines faith as "having utter conviction in the absence of tangible proof". But perhaps people are looking too hard for proof of what can only be taken on faith.

In the business world, we are accustomed to looking hard for tangible answers. So it is not surprising that we try to find the secret to leadership by examining leaders' minutest habits and quirks. Their behaviors look so obviously right we assume that we can find the secret "how to" if only we look hard enough at their actions. This is one reason we search so hard for "best practices".

John Kotter, the Kamasutee professor of leadership at Harvard Business School, has a best selling Harvard Business Review reprint, "What Leaders Actually Do", that describes a leader's day in the smallest details. For example, he cites the general manager as doing such things as "xxx" and sums up the lesson by concluding, "xxx".

Kotter is trying to inductively figure out the keys to leadership by studying the behaviors and actions of leaders. He is trying to catch the butterfly.

But a good leader's actions will flow from something deeper - a tranquil state of mind that is more able to access his or her own common sense. Because each moment is unique, the leader's actions will flow naturally from his or her own insights. These insights will be right for that circumstance.

If someone else tries to apply these same actions elsewhere they will surely miss the mark and lack inspiration. Leading with verve manifests itself as a fresh and vital act. Every "moment in time" calls for its own solutions. Think how stale life would be without this - we would all be trapped in our own version of "Groundhog Day". Good leaders instinctively know that memory or knowledge will not necessarily provide them with the right answers -- no matter how hard they try to figure something out, the solution may well prove more and more elusive.

Wisdom arises from the consciousness that lies within all of us. In other words, all of us have the power to be wise by looking deep within. But you must find this wisdom yourself since it comes from your own soul via the quietness of your own mind when it is calm and clear like the waters of a quietly flowing river.

For example, when our thoughts are filled with worry, anxiety, or self-importance, our wisdom and common sense elude us. Our minds may simply be too active and distracted. But once we "see" that it is we who think, we instantly have the power to pay attention to these thoughts, or not. The moment one steps back from these thoughts one begins to create a quieter and calmer mind.

As one's thoughts quiet one notices how accessible their own insights become. Thought begins to take on the characteristics of a muscle, useful for the purpose of creating our lives via insights just as our bodies are useful for the purpose of moving us physically via contractions.

If something seems unsolvable, rather than continue to dwell on it, they just put the problem on the back burner for a while knowing

that insights will emerge. Those answers come to them “out of the blue”, not out of the book! They have faith in the power of reflection and insight, even when they cannot prove that it will be accessible on demand.

Another thing these leaders realize is that if thought creates their reality, then how can they see with clarity if their minds are cluttered with the memories of yesterday? Think how often you have found yourself at meetings thinking, hearing, or perhaps saying things like, “we tried that before and it didn’t work then so why expect it to work now?”, or “I don’t agree!”, or even “this organization is incapable of accomplishing anything!”. These negative thoughts are like a foggy windshield, they prevent the driver from seeing things clearly. And no matter how hard they try, the road ahead eludes them.

When thoughts turn in a positive direction, people become hopeful knowing that possibilities exist beyond their own personal knowledge and experience. Leaders who understand the nature of thought do not say that experience and learning are not valuable, but point instead to attaining the proper balance between their intellect and common sense. Thus, they lead with their hearts as well as their heads.

They have learned to expect that whatever is needed at any moment will come to them, perhaps in the form of a past experience with a new twist, or something they read that takes on new applicability, or an aha(!) that never occurred to them before.

Wise leaders know about moments of truth – times when a decision needs to be taken and the outcome is uncertain. Trusting your wisdom is like trusting in life the way a child does. Children’s default setting is to trust themselves which is why they say the “darndest things”. But it is also why they are unafraid to act, to learn, and to pick themselves up when they fail.

There are no tools or methodologies that bridge the gap between action and result. The leader just has to trust that things will work

out. The same is true for leading from your own wisdom -- it takes a leap of faith.

## **Leading with Grace**

Many leaders direct human activity with a certain roughness or insensitivity, but few do so with consideration and ease. Perhaps a few of them think that the mark of a good leader is to command or be authoritarian. And some may be afraid and do so out of their anxiousness. But most are simply not aware of how they are coming across.

Thoughts of urgency about accomplishing the goal, concern about everything that needs to be done, worry about how well things may go, or plain old self-centeredness propel them to act inconsiderately.

What is different about people who lead with grace and ease? Certainly they have developed awareness about their thinking and how it affects their behavior. But they have also honed their capacities for being more reflective, explorative, and compassionate.

## **Reflecting**

Reflection is the state of listening to one's inner voice for insights about a question and accessing intelligence that may go beyond one's personal knowledge or experience. It is the process of quieting one's mind sufficiently to frame a question, seeing what insights occur by listening to oneself, and then taking those insights to a deeper level of understanding.

People do this all the time. They call it pipe dreaming, imagining, or mediating. For example, suppose you were with a group of friends who wanted to go to dinner. Someone asks, "Where can we go tonight?". Within moments several people may make suggestions

based on what occurs to them in that second. It's the sense of having a "good idea" and then sharing that with others.

Leaders who have honed their reflection capacities can be uncommonly effective. What is it they do differently?

For one thing a "reflective" leader will more likely think about the purpose first. What is it we are trying to accomplish by having dinner – have a good time, get some work done, or know one another better? Once they are clear about the "purpose" they may reframe the original question.

Sometimes the question about purpose will be profound in itself. Have you ever been in a meeting where someone called this question and been jolted by its impact? It is a case of pointing to the "dead horse" that is lying on the table and which everyone has been trying to studiously ignore!

A reflective leader knows that the feeling in the room is a pivotal factor in pointing out the dead horse. For example, if the tone is one of anxiety or anxiousness, putting a "big" question on the table may cause the mood to deteriorate further. The reflective leader knows that when feelings are negative, the quality of thinking in the room will be poor so their focus needs to be on restoring a more positive and hopeful tone. Laughter is a great antidote to fear, anxiousness, or self-centeredness. So is pointing to hope or just taking a break.

Another thing they do is help the group to "stay with" their first thoughts rather than continue to share more insights. Have you ever seen a group of eight-year-olds try to do something together? A question will be posed, most everyone will start making suggestions, some of them will start arguing about each other's ideas, others will continue making more suggestions until, mercifully, someone acts.

Meetings can easily take on this form, it is so familiar! One feels as though the group is skimming along the surface of a lake getting

bounced around by the waves rather than going beneath the surface of things to the more tranquil water where perspective and depth lie.

Reflective thinking is at the heart of all good meetings. These leaders know that the more reflective thought, the shorter the meeting and the more accomplished.

Rather than letting participants talk past one another, the leader asks people to consider what they are saying and listen more deeply to themselves. It is a process of slowing things down by saying things like, “please tell us more about your thought”, “what about it is true for you”, or “can you elaborate this or that aspect of your idea”.

This can take fortitude for groups often want to forge ahead generating “their lists” rather than take the time to reflect about what they are actually saying. Think how frequently the walls are covered with flip charts but the essence of the matter is not addressed until the last 15 minutes, if at all. When a leader slows the group down and helps them reflect early on, not only will the meeting be over in a shorter time, but also the insights are better because people are fresh and energized.

Most people say that while they experience insights when they are taking a shower, driving a car, or enjoying their vacations, but they are not available when they are working. Leaders who appreciate the power of reflection know that the default setting for most people is to throw themselves into action when faced with an issue rather than stop to think first.

Busy mindedness crowds out insight and common sense. This flurry of mental activity makes it appear that something is being done, but in reality the problem is rarely being solved. More often these reactions obscure the root causes and result in the same issue coming up again and again.

Often a moment of reflection is worth weeks of effort. Reflection is what enables us to see to the heart of the matter and find

fundamental solutions to puzzles. All this requires is stopping to listen to one's inner voice by stepping back from what you "already know" and look in the direction of "not knowing". The leader simply points to this lesson and then helps something clarify their own thoughts through gentle listening.

As one becomes more adept at reflection, it is easier to listen to others. Good leaders are known for their reflective and listening skills. Wayne Calloway, the former CEO of PepsiCo, was famous for this. According to Roger Enrico, the man who replaced him, one could "have a meaningful two hour conversation with Wayne and he would have only said a few words". Deep listening has the effect of producing insight in others. Insight is where wisdom and common sense reside. It yields solutions to the most sought after questions.

Might not our habit of trying to analyze things get in the way of our common sense? Analysis leads to paralysis since it can easily obscure the heart of the matter. Analysis applied to the past cannot let you grasp the future, no matter how hard one tries nor how good ones tools.

### **Exploring**

Exploration is the process of being creative and responsive to the moment. When a group does this together, they bring their dreams and hopes to life.

But jumping into the unknown is like taking that first plunge into the ocean on a hot day. Immersion in that cool water feels so delicious that one cannot believe why it was so hard to take that first step.

How do graceful leaders help themselves and others step into the unknown?

For one thing they point clearly to a direction by articulating a goal. One of the clearest examples of this was John Kennedy's challenge to

the nation to put a man on the moon by the end of the 60's. Since businesses are about accomplishing work through collective energy, someone needs to give direction so that exploration has a purpose.

Mucking around is a critical element of exploration. When a team is looking to do something uncommon they are inevitably going to be taking some wrong turns and heading down false paths. Understanding what it is they do not know is an essential component of seeing what it is they need to know. Leaders committed to exploration help the group keep their bearings as this process unfolds. Their confidence is contagious and its presence helps the team see things more clearly as they operate from a higher degree of awareness.

They have the humility to say, "I don't know" in the face of an urgently posed question or a challenge. When a leader does this it can have a calming effect on everyone since it validates our ability to think for ourselves. Looking not to know not only frees the leader from the pressure of feeling the burden of having to come up with the right answer, but more importantly empowers others to think for themselves thus securing buy in to self generated solutions. How different this is from the leaders who try to sell or, even worse, tell their people what to do.

Exploration is also at the heart of creativity. Toyota's remarkable production system shows the results of breaking new ground continuously. They have the most efficient automobile manufacturing company in the world. The Lexus factory in Toyota City makes 300 cars every day with just 66 people. One way they did this was by teaching ordinary production line workers to ask themselves "why" five times when confronted with a problem or opportunity. This question triggers the exploration process and enables people to get to the bottom of things and illuminate the obvious.

Try it yourself. You will be amazed at the depth of insights you generate the freshness of the solutions, and ease of taking action. Talk about making the leaders job easy!

Exploration is also based on hope. Hope is the knowledge that there are possibilities that go beyond what anyone has known or personally experienced. It frees people to let go of their negative thoughts and let their minds clear so they can be creative. Children are great teachers. They are fearless in their own willingness to try things they have never done before and can be adamant in their insistence to do it themselves.

It simply does not matter to them about how they look or how well they do it. In that regard they are great role models for leaders. Releasing inner intelligence requires a certain freedom from the mental prison of egocentric thinking. Hard to do when the leader has his/her self-esteem at stake, but easy to do if he or she is not thinking personally.

These leaders also know that exploration can lead to conflict. Whenever a group is attempting something new, ideas about what to do or how to do it can take on a life of their own. Exploring means that evaluation of results can only happen once the results are in. Conflict arises when people become wedded to their own answers and assumptions and do not see them as merely their thoughts. Add a dose of imagination about how the future might turn out and one has a recipe for endless argument.

The leader encourages the group to step back from their own “right answers” and listen more deeply to one another for what might be true for them.

As they do this learning takes place. People’s thoughts evolve by seeing things differently. Suddenly, what they were holding so dearly looks ridiculous. The shift in thinking can be tangible as people see a third way, one that integrates the conflicting points of

view and creating a path forward that takes the best thoughts and puts them to work.

Finally, they encourage everyone to stay present by living in “this moment”. The past does not interest them for they know that these experiences are just a memory. Nor are they preoccupied by the future for they know it cannot be foretold.

Imagination is a powerful force. We are always making stuff up. But why take negative memories and project them into the future using imagination? Exploration is the process of seeing deeply into the heart of things as they are now. The leader sees his or her job as keeping this clear.

### **Understanding**

“What goes around comes around” is a truism. Leaders who act with innocence, compassion, and forgiveness inspire people to do their best without fear of retribution or retaliation.

Our misconceptions about leadership get in our way. How often have you heard that leaders must elicit fear in order to be obeyed? Or that they have to judge the faults in others in order to prevent mistakes? Or even that keeping score is the only way to get ahead? Countless books about business hold these attributes as the mark of leadership.

That they work in the short run is undeniable, but what about the long run?

A leader who looks for the innocence in people’s actions rather than the intent not only spends far less time cluttering their own minds with made-up stories, but also learns what they need to know in order to lead. Finding out why someone did what they did with a neutrality of inquiry, will help both people gain insights that flow easily from a quiet, calm state of mind.

Warmth towards people is what establishes a more human connection in the dealings with others. When leaders hold this in their hearts, people feel respected and valued. This helps free them from personal thinking, turn their full attention to the business matters at hand, and give it their best shot. They simply want to help others, including the leader, succeed.

Kindness is another state of mind that promotes well being in organizations. These can be small acts that help someone work through issues, step back from problems, or balance home and family commitments. Kind acts rarely require investment of money since what is more valued is the commitment of others to help in time of need. So this has more to do with sincere inquiry as to how someone is doing and then acting to help relive the burden.

Warmth and kindness are at the heart of customer service, that illusive condition to treat customers the same way that you wish to be treated yourself. Organizations led by people who value kindness show in their daily actions how to establish rapport with others and learn about their true needs.

Too often business people say that you can become too soft if these qualities are taken to heart. But consider how helpful they can be for a leader who is hard-nosed, but does not want to lead by being hard-hearted. Would someone who is warm and compassionate not be more capable of having the difficult conversations in ways that result in permanent solutions?

Sandy Weill, the co-CEO of Citigroup was interviewed in the NY Times recently. He pointed to several dinners with executives and their spouses as helping him in subsequent meetings where he had to deliver "bad news" about their future career prospects at the company.

Collaboration is the key to creating a high performance organization because today's opportunities and issues have a significant cross-

functional element. How many senior executives can single-handedly control their organization's destiny?

Collaboration is based on mutual respect, warmth, and appreciation. When they are present the character of meetings changes dramatically for it becomes easy to put the difficult issues on the table and explore them with an open mind. Common ground is created quickly as executives work shoulder to shoulder. This spirit can infuse the organizations and what looked so difficult before become commonplace. Doing the right thing for the company grows from feelings of doing right by one's peers.

The distinction between collaboration and cooperation is one of feeling and inner wisdom over form and procedure. Cooperation takes lots of work as the word implies. Procedures, policies, and endless meetings negotiating agreements are the hallmark of cooperative organizations. While they do improve performance, the effort can be overwhelming. In collaborative organizations, like W.L. Gore, working in unison does not mean endless meetings or proscriptive actions for collaboration means that others will act in accordance within agreed to principles, not necessarily in conformance to established policies.

Finally, the leader who forgives mistakes frees everyone from the negativity of past events. There is a CEO who put on the wall a statement to the effect that the company is trying to "build a better tomorrow from the accomplishments of the past". Unwittingly, he was condemning the organization to devolution rather than evolution for how could it transcend its past accomplishments or mistakes.

Leading with love, compassion, and warmth engenders high spirits, fun, and harmony. We spend so much time working, who wants to do it unhappily? Who would not want to enjoy working as much as living?

Life is a contact sport so there is no guarantee that trouble will pass you by. In fact some leaders say that without problems what would they do at work anyway. But the ability to overcome adversity with ease and grace is a hallmark of great and inspired leadership.

## **Applying the Lessons**

Mary Parker Follett has defined leadership as the process of directing human accomplishment. It follows that the quality of leading is the critical ingredient of great companies for the hallmark of the best organizations is their achievements.

Yet the lament heard most often is that leadership is the scarcest commodity today. Few business are lacking for good ideas or money, but many are finding that they simply do not have the leadership to take full advantage of the opportunities they see as possible.

But what if our assumption was that leadership was the most abundant resource? What if we saw clearly that every person in a company had the potential with them to see what needed doing and get it done?

This essay has been pointing to exactly that state of affairs. It is describing a world where each person shares in an inherent, God-given potential to lead using their own wisdom and common sense. By using the gift of clear-minded thought to direct our lives with creativity and spontaneity, we have the potential to excel no matter what the circumstances.

Leadership takes several forms. Let us explore three common positions to illustrate how the concepts and ideas in this paper might be applied to release the leadership potential in your company. The three jobs are that of the individual contributor, the leader of others, and the leaders of leaders.

## Individual Contributors

Every company has many people who are making significant contributions quietly and effectively. They are always in demand and yet seem to do their work easily. Yet they appear to be as scarce as hens teeth. What does it take for the majority of the workforce to contribute in this way?

One thing would be to spot the people who are naturally quiet minded, warm, and able to take things in stride and then build teams around them. Their positive feelings would rub off on others and lift the performance of those around them.

Another action would be to create jobs for them that have a built-in need for interactions with other departments or functions. Their understanding, warmth, and friendliness would spread to other units while lifting the performance of their home organization measurably.

Because they are learn new things easily and are fun to be with, they make great team members for project work. Think about some of your best young people, is it not true that one thing that sets them apart is their complete innocence in not knowing? Their ability to soak up the lessons from others and use them in fresh and innovative ways is always a bit startling. Projects are almost always a journey exploring the unknown because so often they are an attempt to change how things work. Their peers enjoy working with them for their high spirited, calm, and warm feelings are contagious and infect the project team with a positive, can-do quality.

Teaching them about thought would help them become more effective spokespersons for the value of a calm, quiet state of mind in the workplace. Because these people are able to access their inner wisdom so easily, it can be a surprise that most people cannot count on their own common sense and awareness being available when they need it. They have lost sight of the fact that it is their own thinking that creates their reality and not the other way around.

Finally, coaching their managers is important, for the first level often tries to keep these people under wraps. They make such a big impact their supervisors do not want to lose their services. While this is understandable, the solution is increase the number of people who are this effective, not hoard the ones you already have!

Give me a lever long enough and a prop strong enough and  
I can single handedly move the world.

- Archimedes -

### **Team or Departmental Leaders**

The predominant characteristic of leaders who are already operating from this understanding is their deep commitment be in service of others, not themselves. They hold the well-being, growth in capability, and accomplishment of others foremost in their thinking and act accordingly.

The question on their minds is not “what do I need to do?”, but rather “what needs doing for the group?”. Reflecting on this question helps everyone tap into their own collective wisdom and common sense. and use their talents in ways that go beyond what any single person could accomplish. In essence, the leader is accountable to others for their progress -- this is a far cry from the concept of authority with autocratic control.

The grounding of these leaders is everything. They really need to understand the inside-out nature of leadership – that creativity, effectiveness, grace under pressure, rapport, and high spirited teams originate in the quality of people’s thinking process.

It follows that helping them deepen their own “leadership from within” capacities is the critical leverage point. These people have

some of the best jobs in companies, since their hands are firmly on the tiller as they guide their respective ships.

Not every leader will be willing to commit themselves to this personal journey. And no one can “give it to them”. They have to be willing to find it for themselves. In Hawaii, the leaders were called Kahunas. “Kahuna” means those who understand the secret of life that cannot be told.

A note of patience is also required. Certain leaders who are achieving excellent results will not want to take this journey because they have already found their means of being successful so why change. This is exactly the group that Jack Welch pointed to as being the most challenging if he was going to change the “genetic DNA” of General Electric.

In the short term, this implies a certain co-existence of the leadership philosophy that is being used. But with time as more young people are mentored by those who have found their inner leadership ability, the old, command and control, style will die out.

"Everybody can be great. Because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

- Martin Luther King -

### **Leaders of Leaders**

People who rise to senior and executive positions have only one primary task and that is assuring the development of future leaders.

This is easier said than done! What is it that these wise leaders actually do?

Foremost they deepen their understanding of using their own innate knowledge as the essential aspect of leading and living. They are well balanced and happy and draw out the best in others. If you see a person like this in your company, go work for them and find your own inner wisdom.

If they are interested in nurturing leaders who understand thought as the essential ingredient of leading with creativity, freshness, ease, warmth, and grace, then they will seek to draw out the innate intelligence and wisdom of others.

These leaders are not interested in creating followers who mimic them or try to emulate their style. Quite the contrary. They seek people who are independent minded and good listeners for these qualities point to a desire to find themselves for themselves.

That they are clearly on a journey themselves is self-evident. A higher level of consciousness begets the curiosity keep going every upward as more and more of the essential quality of life is revealed. This is why they are such good teachers, for a teacher is first a student themselves. It is the questions posed by others that stimulates the search for deep understanding.

They look to the feeling first since feelings point to the quality of thought. Warm, positive feelings lead to good outcomes that persist, but anxious, self-important thought lead to superficial improvement dearly attained. It is the leader of leaders job to point out the link of performance and thought for it is a habit to attribute solid results to superficial factors.

And they are patient to a point. They know that this knowledge cannot be forced on anyone for the foolish who think themselves wise are, in fact, utterly foolish. The immature are their own worst

enemies, for they are continually doing selfish deeds that bring them sorrow. They also avoid those who go after false prestige, seeking power from the headquarters and praise from their peers thus increasing their pride and passion. So the leader does not waste his or her time with leaders as foolish as this.

As irrigators lead the water where they want,  
As archers make their arrows straight,  
As carpenters carve the wood,  
The wise shape their minds.

- The Dhammapada-

## **Summing Up**

The clues to self-awareness have been spoken about by the wise since the beginning of time. We are speaking about soul power, not will power as the fundamental source of leading with grace, ease, and wisdom.

When we are leading well our minds are calm and out thinking clear. When we are leading poorly, our minds are busy and out thinking muddled. When our thoughts are confused, focused on ourselves, or revved up like a racecar engine, then our leadership is sure to be lacking in common sense intelligence.

Those who commit themselves to the journey of understanding their own intelligence and common sense will find that leading comes naturally as their inner wisdom becomes more and more accessible. Once this virtuous circle has begun, one finds there is no limit to their depth of understanding and insight. Simplicity reigns where chaos once ruled.

For Further Readings:

The Missing Link, by Sydney Banks

Slowing Down to the Speed of Life, by Richard Carlson and Joseph Bailey

The Art of Leadership, by Max Du Pree

The Dhammapada, edited by Eknath Easwardan

What Makes a Leader?, by Daniel Goleman, Harvard Business Review, November-December, 1998

Servant Leadership, by Robert K Greenleaf

The Principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness, unpublished paper by Judith A. Sedgeman

