

THE LEADERS THAT ARE NEEDED NOW

In the last few years at The World Economic Forum in Davos the word 'unprecedented' has been more and more frequently used in relation to the social, economic, religious and ecological challenges facing us.

In the business environment in which I work with senior leaders all over the world, individuals and teams are often struggling, unable to effectively navigate the growing complexity and volatility of their environment. This takes a heavy personal and professional toll. Mostly this is because they are relying on mindsets and capacities that, while once very effective, are simply past their sell-by date, and they don't know how to adapt. In fact, the very mindsets they use to try to adapt *are* very often the problem. They know they are struggling, yet often don't have an alternative map.

Our education systems start at an early age to narrow our full range of thinking, feeling and imagining. The obsession with left-brain function, with tasks, tests and targets starts horrifyingly early, and there are thankfully an increasing number of voices and initiatives in the educational world that speak against this and offer new curriculum models.

Einstein had a favourite aphorism hanging in his office. It said:

"What counts cannot always be counted, and what can be counted does not always count"

Whenever I quote this in a corporate setting, there is firstly big nodding and a sigh of recognition and relief, followed by a sigh of frustration, even despair, at the world that seems only to value what can be counted.

Reality is significantly determined by the lenses through which we perceive it. To use a computer analogy, if I have a narrow bandwidth of thinking, feeling and perceiving, then that is how the world will look like for me. Someone who has worked to widen their bandwidth will see a much more subtle web of forces at play in any individual or situation. Put another way, it is as if we drive in a car through life with a windscreen covered in stickers, yet we believe we are looking through a clear windscreen. The quantum and sub-atomic sciences some while ago exploded the concept of a fixed, objective reality 'out there', yet our mainstream world is some way from catching up with this.

The leaders that are needed now first of all recognise this, and work hard to become aware of the stickers on their own windscreens, thus cleansing and enlarging their perceptual range. This means that they have a much more subtle, accurate and multi-dimensional sense of people and scenarios. This, in turn, makes them available for a much higher level of innovation. Artists, entrepreneurs and scientists all know that moments of real discovery and insight 'come', and that a primary task of leadership is to cultivate the capacity of deep receptivity.

Unfortunately, most organisations suffer from a predominantly left-brain, task and numbers obsessed culture, in which intuition, feeling and imagination have been relegated to the outer reaches. They are visited when strictly necessary, but wearing heavy-duty protective clothing if possible. After all, how do you measure a feeling, or an intuition? And what an irrational mess they make....

Einstein put it most eloquently and presciently when he said:

“The rational mind is a faithful servant, our intuitive mind is a sacred gift. We have created a society that honours the servant, and has forgotten the gift”

How he might be turning in his grave now.

There are changes afoot, however. A growing number of consultants, individuals and some institutions are bringing new models, competencies and therefore new consciousness. This is a strong and urgently needed movement.

One symptom of this is how in the last two years the practice of *mindfulness*, an updated version of a 2,500-year-old contemplative Buddhist practice, has entered the mainstream and is increasingly widely used in education and health. The business world seems to be catching on. Major corporations worldwide are starting to bring this practice to their employees.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d9cb7940-ebea-11e1-985a-00144feab49a.html#axzz31rtD7CzB>

<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/price-intel-mindfulness-program-employee>

And the front cover of Time magazine on February 3, 2014:

<http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20140203,00.html>

Mindfulness is a remarkably simple and precise practice of *paying attention*. When understood and regularly used, it has a massive, sometimes radical impact on both professional and personal life. It brings completely new levels of presence, listening and relational competency. The listening extends to our business scenarios, helping us to become attuned to the emergence of solutions and strategies that are free of the thinking patterns we mechanically reproduce, free from those stickers on our windscreens. In short, a much more profound and transformative level of innovation and ultimately an understanding of the *practice* of inspiration and innovation become a regular and grounded competency.

The leaders we need now are men and women who have the courage to take their own development seriously. This means expanding their capacity to include right and left brain, reason and imagination, proactivity and receptivity, analysis and intuition, intellect and emotion, Being as well as Doing. They also have the courage to look, where necessary, into the darker recesses of their own psyches, to visit and start to heal some of the emotional wounds that, unchecked, drive our behaviour and relationships far more than we usually care to admit.

But most of all, the leaders that we need now arrive at a point in their life where they are no longer primarily driven by their ego, where they expand into a much wider horizon of connectedness, a sense of a much bigger ‘we’, and the natural desire to contribute to, rather than take from the world. They cannot any longer participate in win-lose paradigms, in ‘beating the competition at all costs’ scenarios. They are ‘servant leaders’ intent on the good of the whole, and who understand in a direct, feeling way what the mystical traditions have always clearly stated - that you are me, that the world is me, and that our experience of separateness is, as Einstein called it “a temporary delusion of consciousness”. In the words of another visionary leader:

“All are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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