

Leadership

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The Living Workplace

. . . *Virtual Leadership; Collaborative Leadership; Empowering Leadership; Organizational Leadership; Innovative Leadership; Inspired Leadership; Military Leadership; Ethical Leadership; Values-based Leadership; Primal Leadership; Visionary Leadership* . . .

These are just a few of the many labels currently being used in the extensive discussions taking place everywhere on the subject of leadership. They, and the discussions themselves, are indicative of widespread global disenchantment with both corporate and political leadership.

Gone is the habit of reciprocal trust between leaders and led, in the workplace and in the community. Gone, too, is the belief in a sense of shared responsibility for, and pride in, corporate and political success. Sadly, serious distrust and disengagement have supplanted these traditional values.

The obvious challenge facing us today is to rethink our concepts of leadership, decision-making, workplace satisfaction, and communication. We need to step out of our inherited mold and create systems based on the principles of honesty, integrity, compassion, and intuition.

And for this we need genuine leaders, leaders who recognize they do not have all the answers but who are willing to listen, reflect, and learn, openly and honestly, and reach across conventional boundaries to embrace new knowledge and new ways of leading.

These leaders we can confidently follow, for they will be sufficiently generous and assured to lead the way into emotionally uncharted territory and to “celebrate the unknown,” and will be courageous enough to act alone when necessary.

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In truth, when we consider our connection and commitment to one another within our workplaces and communities, we could say we are all leaders. For each of us bears a responsibility for the world we live in and can, and must, individually and collectively, embrace accountability and the empowerment it brings.

At present I am researching my second book on Leadership; I recently interviewed Max De Pree (*The Art of Leadership*, Doubleday, 1987), Noel Tichy (*The Cycle of Leadership*, HarperCollins, 2002), and Tom Chappell (*Managing Upside Down*, William Morrow, 1999).

While conducting these and other interviews, it has become increasingly clear to me that common threads unite their ideas. They all say the same thing.

First, they talk about “making a difference”: about transforming people from being other-directed, dutiful

followers into being inner- or self-directed leaders—people who have discovered the fundamental power and importance of their individual contribution to the whole.

And second, they talk about “the passion”: the belief in and commitment to the values these leaders espouse, and the fact they are being seen to live those values every moment without compromise.

The wise leader
Encourages open minds
and strong centres.

Tao, 3

To achieve this requires regular self-analysis and introspection. Recent statistics show the average leadership expectancy of a CEO today in any one business is two-and-a-half years. When I addressed the Canadian Newspaper Association last year, however, three well-known publishers responded to this statistic with a degree of doubt. Two of them are no longer in their leadership roles today.

Along with a commitment to ethical leadership, other significant challenges now face leaders. Included among these challenges are the ability to take risks, the necessity to be creative and innovative—all the while encouraging others to do and be so also—and the requirement to constantly strive to evolve new business models that will keep up with our fast-changing economy and ever-changing consumer demands. As if these challenges are not enough, there is always the persistent mandate to retain profits.

In this obviously shifting, fluid, and challenging business environment, mistakes can happen, but learning from them is possible. Not only is it possible, but it is of paramount importance. And it takes courage. It is the exceptional leader who can understand that mistakes can, and do, occur but who does not lose faith in the creative aspirations and accomplishments of others.

It is also the exceptional leader who can maintain expectations, yet remain vigilant to the fact that these may produce unrealistic standards, and who does not lose sight of the fact that perfection, though essential to strive for, does not exist.

There are, however, guiding principles that will help transform the leadership of today. Collaboration, communication, and compassion are just some of the new tenets of leadership. As all levels of industry and community gain access to knowledge—once the prerogative and domain of upper-

management only—“inter-connection” has become and must remain the platform for developing a new concept of leadership.

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A new language is emerging to describe this concept; it needs to be learned and embraced by leaders. This language encompasses the concepts of harmony, spirit, authenticity, and thoughtfulness. Those organizations whose leaders keep this language and these convictions always in the foreground and whose leaders employ the new tenets of leadership to serve their organizations, are noticeable for the difference in their

working environments and their performance.

They exhibit the true essence of the living workplace. ▲

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