

Completing the weave

Winter is rightly a time of discontent. Spring, with all its promise, emerges violently from its hidden caverns. Summer produces not growth but stilted examples of what might have been. Autumn, the season of color, of abundance, of bounty, of harvest in all of its glory, is scarce present. A cold wind is blowing through the land!

The allegory is of the seasons, but the cold breath of nature speaks of leadership. It describes unfulfilled promise. Unfulfilled because, despite the intense focus over the past two decades, leadership still represents the chief malady of organizational performance. The evidence: 80% plus of major change initiatives fail, the vast majority of mergers and acquisitions do not deliver on that promised, there is little correlation between IT spending and business results, the recruitment lag for the right person to steer a troubled organization through heavy seas is 12 months or more. If the role is global, shout for your chequebook. McKinsey, the consulting firm, even talks of the “War for Talent.” Loss of loyalty, burnout, an inability to deal with the emerging complexity, cultural myopia, a win-lose mentality, short-term predatory buying practices – they all blow the weathervane in the direction of a leadership malaise.

There are, of course, success stories. Our leaders have been well trained in the science, although less well in the art, of strategy. By the multitude they can measure, analyze, refine, budget, and work the numbers such that financial engineering has come to contain within it an elegant beauty all of its own. The market place has been segmented, and segmented, and will, no doubt, be segmented many times more. Today's channels of distribution would be alien to someone who retired even as little as 12 or 18 months ago. Those who preach of core business competencies have raised their intellectual wards to the status of superstars. Winter is all that could be asked of it. Leadership as defined by the head is alive and thriving – as, indeed, it must be.

The story doesn't end there. The power of technology, end-to-end value chains, the process organization, the ability to run international projects around the world 24 hours a day, improved cycle times, managing knowledge, brand management, flattened structures,

minimal bureaucracy, six sigma, JIT, infrastructure management, benchmarking, smart systems, reengineering, aggressive outsourcing – they all speak of value creation. Spring is in full bloom. Leadership, as represented by the hand, is a gardener's delight – as indeed, it must be.

But what of the insufficiency? There is a yearning in the land - a cry for something beyond that being offered. It is more than a cry, it is a chorus, one that has reached a crescendo where the common voice is: **What about me!** Each year we train thousands of businessmen and women. What has somehow been lost is that leadership isn't just about measures and processes and/or things; leadership, when all is said and done, is a noble calling – it is about enriching people's lives. Leadership is a privilege. It is a sacred trust.

Nature's plan lies not within any single season but in its unfolding unity. Each season is a special time, but it is the whole that yields nature's wealth. So it is with leadership. Leadership that defines the *mission* is of the head (winter). Leadership that generates *movement* is of the hand (spring). Leadership that builds through *mastery* must touch people's hearts (summer). Leadership that provides *meaning* has to encompass the spirit (autumn). **Only when all of the seasons are "full," only when each unfolds one unto another can leadership bring about a transformation.** Only when the *leadership weave* is complete can leadership be the difference that makes a difference. The reality: creating a loyal and vital community counts for naught if the competition is eating your lunch. Conversely, in that it continuously diminishes the only sustainable means to differentiate and compete, leadership that originates only from the head and hand destroys value – it strips the organization of emotional capital. For people to give *of themselves* they need to feel that to change is to step into the light. For people to be deeply committed, they have to believe that the journey they are being asked to take is one that has personal meaning. What people are yearning for are leaders who can not only address the head and deliver the hand, *but also engage the heart and enrich the spirit.* There is overwhelming evidence to support the contention that many of us are well versed in the head and hand. None of us can become masterful leaders, however, until we *complete the weave.*

Engaging the heart

The head frames *direction*. The hand describes *the how*. The heart is engaged when people know, **really know**, *why!* Work that demands stretch, responsibility that empowers,

customers who are delighted, openness of communication, dialogue, understanding, ownership, and involvement, all transform apathy into appetite; turn a willingness to go along into a desire to excel. Learning and growth enrich the heart. To appeal to the heart is to incite passion and commitment.

Organizations spawned over the past two hundred years have been the product of two far-reaching assumptions. The first: without extensive rules, policies and procedures, people will act irresponsibly. The second: the best way to organize an enterprise is to create simple jobs linked together by complex processes. The first destroys trust. The second robs those involved of any feelings of personal worth. To touch people's hearts is to reach into every far corner and purge the enterprise of these beliefs. Leaders who engage the heart build from the premise of trust.

Language and imagery touch the heart. A lame, "me too," one-dimensional picture of tomorrow is a mandate for mediocrity. A vision that fails to present a vivid, vibrant, compelling future is a signal that the organization is destined to be forever becalmed. Metaphors and symbols that exalt the kill, but omit the warrior's reverence for the prey, define a "hunt" devoid of honor. Language that excludes, that limits, that restricts, that belittles, that signals elitism, that is about ego, that dwells unnecessarily on yesterday, that reinforces hierarchical power, that is about the act of bossship, that puts down the customer, that seeks to control, creates a toxic environment that breeds cynicism and, at the first sign of difficulty, despair. Language that sings of the possible, that challenges, that celebrates, that shares, that affirms, that encourages, that is woven into positive story, that sparkles with humor, that is rooted in modesty, that is filled with wisdom, is language that engages the heart. Leaders understand that language isn't merely important, they act with the knowledge that language is everything.

The change of cadence and rhythm that accompanies new patterns of play engages the heart. Champions are nourished not by what worked yesterday but by the opportunity to move into new space. The presumption that new behaviors cannot emerge from entrenched ways is to admit defeat before the clash of battle is enjoined. Championships are won by the unexpected, by the bold act the opposition had not planned for, by a finely honed sense of the "moment." The best strategy is to ask what is the most damaging thing the competition can do, and do it first. New patterns create new opportunity. Leaders who make a difference constantly change their own patterns of play.

There are four ways to “know.” There is the knowing of the head, the knowing that comes from analysis, study and presentation. There is the knowing of the hand that comes from a sense of kinetic awareness, from touching, through observation. There is knowing from the heart, an intuitive sense of what feels right. And there is the knowing rooted in the spirit, a deep inner awareness that connects self, time, and purpose. Knowing from the head and the hand translates data into information. Knowing from the heart and spirit transforms information into knowledge and, when complemented by rich experience, into a quality best described as wisdom. Leaders who make critical decisions based on *knowing* that is skewed heavily to the head and hand are ignoring the reality that much of what they are measuring and even observing is either out of date, or redundant. In a world where speed of response, organizational agility, and an ability to manage uncertainty rule, leaders destined to thrive are those who, when the situation demands it, listen to their heart and trust their spirit.

Values touch people’s hearts. Here we speak not of organizational values - invariably generated with the naive assumption that organizations can create, without factoring in people’s emerging wants, aspirations and desires, something called a *culture* - but of the concerns and needs of those who make the organization work. Organizational values may touch people’s hearts, often they don’t. Few front-line employees get up with the lark, have a sparkle in their eye, and a spring in the step, and a song on their lips, all inspired by the thought of getting to work early to *create shareholder value*. Organizational values are of the head. People’s personal values are of the heart. Leaders who make a difference build alignment between organizational and personal values.

An interesting question is to ask someone who has achieved success, “Who or what was it that made the difference in your life?” The answer invariably points to someone who listened, someone who inspired, someone who took the time, someone who gave them the strength to follow their passion, someone who encouraged them to soar - a teacher, a mentor, a coach. To share of one’s self is to engage the heart. To share one’s story and to guide a colleague, peer, or subordinate through and past the waiting organizational pitfalls, is to engage the heart. To provide the context, the challenge, the opportunity, and to give honest feedback, with the result that a subordinate and/or team member embraces his/her full potential, is to engage the heart. Leaders who make a difference **always** make the time to teach, mentor, and coach.

There is no magic, no secret elixir, and no hidden formula to hiring and keeping talent. People are drawn to organizations where they feel they can grow and make a difference. People decide to stay when they feel that they are being listened to, are informed as to what is going on, know themselves to be successful and believe that regardless of what happens to the business they have currency in the job market. If there is a common thread that links these attributes, it is learning. Leaders who make a difference are those who build awareness through rich conversation. Leaders who sustain are those who have a passion to learn.

Learning is of the heart. New ways to be necessitates new ways to learn. Invaluable as training and instruction are, they are not the means whereby people see their work anew. A world being continuously transformed means that those who stand in the eye of the storm must be capable of navigating even when the wind, rain and lightning crash together with full force. For the leader, it means that traditional forms of learning must give way to *learning how to learn*. This, in turn, means that the learning must be elegantly crafted to fit the context. Three routes, in particular, lie open. The first, learning based on and drawn out of the experience of others: case study, business simulation, implementing best practice developed elsewhere. The second, where the learner moves to the center of the arena and where the boundaries have a degree of stretch, e.g. the freedom to act that underscores true employee empowerment. The third, where the learner defines not only the learning process but what is possible e.g. the freedom that research engineers are given at 3M. Leadership that engages the heart recognizes and acts on the belief that *how* people learn is more important than *what* they learn.

Recent times have seen a renaissance in what is often described as “experiential learning.” A wilderness experience, ropes programs, drumming, river rafting, building a children’s playground in a poor part of the city, all represent examples of *learning by doing*. Consistent with Howard Gardner’s theories on multiple intelligence, the essence of experience-based learning is that learning cannot be compartmentalized - it must be made whole. If the emotional dimension of learning is ignored then much of what it takes to succeed is ignored. If people don’t have an opportunity to “touch” their personal edge they are likely to remain ignorant of what they are truly capable of. Teamwork cannot be taught, it can only be lived. Spirit remains a vague and ephemeral concept until the team finds itself lost in the Canadian wilderness. Leaders who make a difference understand that successful learning is a holistic, full-bodied experience that appeals to the head, involves the hand, engages the heart, and enriches the spirit.

Empowerment is a term that carries with it a discordant echo. A litany of negligent implementation, lack of leadership, poor timing, and attempts to retrofit team-based processes into organization structures that emphasize hierarchy and the dominance of the individual have all brought empowerment initiatives into disrepute. The logic (head) of driving out cost that doesn't create customer value has all too often led to the last vestiges of employee loyalty (the heart) being ploughed under. Empowerment creates value when the head, the hand, the heart and the spirit are in balance. Empowerment initiatives have force when the following **ten** conditions have been met: (1) the organization's strategic intent is described by a robust, clear, and winning value proposition; (2) the organization structure and the way the organization moves information is defined by the organization's core business processes; (3) leadership shortfalls have been tackled; (4) the organization hierarchy is subordinate to process/value flow and unnecessary decision-making levels have been torn out; (5) those in functional roles measure their performance by the extent to which they have impacted customer (a real customer, one who signs a cheque) value; (6) those who work within the core processes have the freedom, responsibility, accountability and competency needed to make innovation and a sense of entrepreneurship central to their work; (7) the scope of an individual's work is defined not by the restrictive boundaries of a "job" but by the extent to which he/she can shape the nature of his/her contribution (role); (8) the work being undertaken matches opportunity with capability; (9) the choir and not the lone performer sets the rhythm of organization life; (10) the success of any empowerment initiatives are measured from the customer's perspective. Leadership that enriches the heart enacts empowerment not as yet one more way to reduce cost but as a means whereby people control their own destiny.

Leaders who touch people's hearts manage *through* exception not *by* exception. This means catching people doing it right and not sitting back until failure sets the tone for the relationship. It means celebrating success. It means voicing new ways to approach old problems and stimulating the flow of ideas and suggestions. It means mastery in listening. It means that those in key roles have to understand that the answers voiced are an outcome of the quality of the questions asked. It means that challenging mental models is more important than the assumption that there is a "right" strategy. It means that it is okay for the leader to say, "I don't know." Leaders who make a difference build on success. Leaders who challenge the status quo must be prepared to hear themselves ask "dumb" questions and act in unexpected ways. Leaders who touch people's hearts must be willing to, on occasion, embarrass themselves.

Dialogue is from the heart. Dialogue is a quality conversation where judgement is put on hold; assumptions of outcome, power, and status are parked; and where probing inquiry and time set aside for reflection are deemed a necessary prerequisite for new levels of understanding to emerge. Dialogue is the container whereby people buy-in to the *why*. Dialogue and discussion are not the same. One is the art of the conductor who knows how and when to bring in different instruments such that the outcome is a rich sense of harmony. The other is the skill, knowledge and judgement of the tennis player where the laws of physics dictate that the ball will eventually come to rest on one side of the net. One relies on timing, empathy, and respect (heart); the other on an ability to solve problems (the head). Both are essential. Leaders who make a difference act only after seeing an important opportunity and/or critical problem through the eyes of the other stakeholders.

The heart is represented by summer. Summer is a time of learning. It is a time when questions posed during the winter and amplified during the spring, are answered. It is a time when nature moves to bring the reflection of winter and planting of the spring into fruition. It is a time of flow and light. Summer is when the leader champions, nurtures, and takes pride in growth.

Enriching the spirit

Spirit touches the deepest part of who we are. When we talk of spirit we are giving voice to that which is the very essence of one's way of life. Spirit is more than a description of behavior; more than a personal orientation; more than a song of the possible; spirit is, at its core, *a way to be*.

Spirit is sparked by actions that encompass value beyond personal gain. For the individual, it equates to success of the team. For the team, it means that the organization gains. For the organization, any meaningful definition of success must include the wider community. Leaders that compete successfully for people's commitment build their work around a mission that embodies within it a deep sense of purpose and meaning.

For the leader, spirit is anchored in a passionate desire to serve. Here we face a dilemma. For those brought up with English as a first language, "to serve" conjures up the sounds and pictures of *servitude*. Indeed, the British class system relegates those who serve to one of the lower rungs on the ladder of social importance. In the US "the leader as the lone hero"

equates success with power, domination, and tough-mindedness. The language and imagery in other cultures is less restricting. In Finland, for example, to serve is captured by the word “hinku.” Hinku speaks of not just the value of serving, but the enriching nature, dignity and personal growth that the act of serving embodies. Sustainable leadership, leadership that enriches the spirit, leadership that builds loyalty, leadership that transforms, can only emanate out of a personal feeling of hinku.

To listen to one’s spirit is to know that loneliness and solitude are not the same thing. The former describes a separation, an unnatural state where an individual is like a flower or plant without water - starved of something vital to its growth and ultimate survival. Solitude, on the other hand, is time set aside to reflect and to deepen our understanding of where we are on our life’s mission. Solitude is a natural, empowering and, arguably, essential dimension of knowing who we are. Solitude is a present we give ourselves when the forces that impact our lives are misaligned. Leaders who make a difference are deeply committed to the journey embarked on and are acutely conscious of a need to know and like themselves.

Few have had the joy of being a part of a truly great team. A great team transcends the ordinary, rejects mediocrity and eschews success based on past performance. A great team recognizes the individual while building a culture based on success of the whole. A great team relishes the sounds and feelings evoked by being at the edge. A great team has no weak members, only those who sing in a different key. A great team sees the impossible as merely another challenge and the extraordinary as a base camp for the next push up the mountain. When things go wrong, great teams change gears and put their foot to the floor. Great teams come to win and not to avoid defeat. Great teams don’t have *failure* or *hoped for success* in their CD collection. Great teams live for the sound of winning. Great teams win. Great leaders build great teams.

The glue that bonds and connects those in a great team is spirit. It is a spirit nurtured not by a leader but by leadership. It is a spirit drawn out of a challenge that would sound discordant to an ordinary team. It is a spirit fueled by mutual respect, trust, and disdain for the status quo. It is a spirit that hugs opportunity and relishes risk. It is a spirit that revels in the duality of both belonging, and reaching out to include others. It is a spirit that surfaces in the sharing of best practice and a joy born out of the success of those who overcome adversity. It is a spirit apparent not only in the way success is celebrated but also in the

generosity extended to those who stand on the podium in second place. Leaders who draw others to them display this generosity of spirit.

Spirit and truth cannot be separated. Here we speak not of the self-centered, manipulative mask of the egotist, but of the empathetic honesty that is the mark of maturity and comfort with self. It is a truth that lies not in the head but in the body. It is truth that underscores character, that shares success with others and admits failure early enough for counter measures to be put in place. It is truth that distinguishes criticism from meaningful and honest feedback. It is a truth that carries with it the echo of "I care." It is the truth of the coach who admits, "I am part of the problem here." It is the truth of the leader who listens to the audience, who knows what the players are capable of, where the edge of the stage is, and how to act when members of the cast fail to deliver the performance demanded.

Love and caring are of the heart. Courage draws on the spirit. It is the courage to act with boldness when others hold back. It is the courage to say no when political expediency makes "yes" the comfortable course of action. It is the courage to stand apart from the accepted way to be. It is the courage to rise when adversity, self-doubt and uncertainty cause one to stumble. It is the courage to challenge leadership that is not true to the values being espoused. It is the courage to step out of the way and allow others more qualified to make the decision. It is the courage to listen when the answer seems obvious. It is the courage to let go of behavior that no longer fits the current reality. It is the courage to know that unless I change, nothing changes. It is the courage needed to look into one's own heart. It is the courage to think deeply about issues that others face only in times of crisis: Does the work I am doing have meaning? Who gains? Am I personally growing? Is the way I learn aligned with the organization's culture? Are my personal values being fulfilled? Am I shortchanging those I love? Does what I'm doing engage my heart and enrich my spirit? Is my success based on what I take, or what I give? For the leader, courage is the capacity to bring about personal change, even move on, if the answer(s) that flow back do not resonate - if they do not strike a positive chord.

Spirit speaks of beliefs. For some, these beliefs are drawn from a religious doctrine or credo. For others, their beliefs are more secular in nature. Beliefs are the bedrock that anchors our view of the world. Meaning, inspiration and success are defined by our beliefs. One need look no further than shared beliefs to understand why many not-for-profit organizations

draw thousands to their banner, people who are dedicated, work long hours and often do so for little or no remuneration.

Society is enabled and kept whole by its shared beliefs. Leaders who understand this also know that society at large ultimately plays a key role in setting the stage for spirit to emerge. Few, if any, employees ride to work to produce products that they have little pride in. If the question is health and safety there can only be one answer. No one in a modern society wants to add to the destruction of the planet. It is difficult to argue against honesty. Fairness is a doctrine that has been part of life's unfolding pattern since before the word took written form. Locking young people out of the job market invariably has long-term consequences. Outsourcing work to offshore locations that use production methods based on exploitation and unsafe practices condones and encourages such practices. Repetitive, soul-destroying work strips those so engaged of dignity and self-respect. It is difficult to suggest that tossing people aside like forgotten parts of a broken machine does anything other than unravel the weave of a caring society. Discrimination in its many forms destroys dreams. Only those who benefit directly support executive excess in the form of extravagant life styles. Leadership that enriches the spirit does so by recognizing, respecting, and *living up* to the beliefs of **those they lead**.

Spirit and belonging are travel companions. Each is nurtured and nourished by the other. Belonging is an inner feeling of comfort with space and time. To belong is to know that "I was meant to be here doing this work." Belonging is to be at the center of a wheel; the focal point of a journey that defines purpose, balance and a sense of connection with the other elements needed to move forward. Like the rim of the wheel, belonging is constantly being redefined by the forces and pressures that exist at the edge – the domain where our own learning is at its sharpest. The inner strength that flows from belonging is incomplete without a kinship with the other life forces on our planet: the changing of the seasons, plants, animals, nature, the environment. When the clay of belonging is lost as a life sustaining force, the spirit withers. To endure and grow as a leader is to be conscious of one's sense of belonging.

A prevailing thought in the mind of western culture is that much that ails us can be overcome if only we would spend more time *working on relationships*. Leadership, selling, love, marriage, personal growth, mentoring, self-doubt, so the mantra goes, all can be "fixed" if

relationship skills are brought to the fore. The vast majority of such entreaties are empty vessels destined only to provide more noise and take up valuable emotional space in our lives. The self-help courses these works drum up are invariably of the head and the hand with little sense of the heart and the spirit. The capacity to build and thrive in intimacy is not a technique, or a set of skills to be learned, but a product and outcome of who we are. Intimacy is of the spirit. To be intimate is to give of ourselves without reservation. To be intimate with another we must first be intimate with ourselves. When we gaze into the mirror we must want to know the person who stares back at us. We must be willing to cast aside the masks we use to present ourselves to the world. We must develop the capacity to challenge the inner script that prompts us to act. We must be prepared to *stand naked* and look into the dark crevices of our inner-self. To know one's self is the secret of the master coach. To be open to input from others is a basic condition of sustainable leadership. To be aware of self is the first essential step in drawing richness out of the differences that separate us one from another. The leader's quest, when faced with resistance, conflict, or apathy, is not to try to mold or shape the behavior of others but to surface the discontent and to fill the space created with truth, integrity and authenticity.

Tension, contradiction and paradox fan the flames of spirit. The night is at its darkest just before the light of the dawn. The greatest beauty is that highlighted by a simple flaw. The prodigal son is the one who, upon his return, is asked to sit closest to the fire. The light from a candle is made more apparent by the shadows that it doesn't penetrate. Absolute silence makes the greatest sound. Success is most satisfying when the opponent is at the top of his/her game. The genesis of courage is not to be found in the heroic act, but in the spirit that enabled the performer to overcome his/her initial fear. The goals that generate the greatest degree of intensity are those thought to be beyond the capacity of the team. The coach is often at his/her most effective when he/she resists the need to intervene. Spirit in the warrior is made whole by the balance between the fierceness necessary to draw the bow and the gentleness demanded at the release of the arrow. Spirit in the leader is manifest in the toughness needed to constantly change the patterns of play and the empathy necessary to understand the needs and concerns of those involved in the work.

Fullness of spirit is the drumbeat of abundance. Autumn is a time when seeds planted during the spring and nourished by the warmth of the summer sun, give of their fruit. Autumn is the time of gathering and sharing. Autumn is a time of song. The spirit, as represented by

the harvest, gives meaning to the planning initiated by the head, the planting orchestrated by the hand, and growth as embodied by the heart. Without an opportunity to harvest, the other seasons are merely harbingers of an empty promise. Harvest is a sacred time when *who gains* sets the emotional context for the next cycle of seasons. Leaders, real leaders, those who make a lasting difference, **bring in the harvest**.

There is little more noble than the mighty oak. It stands proud knowing that it has been a religious icon; the building block of empire; a shelter for the weak; and in the hands of the artist, a joy that lasts through the ages. The oak grows and flourishes not because of the primacy of one season but because of the balance between the seasons.

At first appearance our leadership oak appears strong and healthy. It stands tall and continues to grow. Can it be sick? We can't tell by looking more closely at what we see. We can't tell by listening to its mighty branches screaming in the gale. To know, we have to examine the roots. We must reach beyond the head and hand and touch the heart and spirit. Leadership is about balance. *Leadership lies not in any single skill or quality, but in the weave*. It is about the strategy of the head and the processes and systems that are of the hand. Without roots, however, the oak cannot survive. The first major storm, high wind, a drought, if the roots do not go deep this great mass will crash to the ground. Wisdom remains an untapped commodity, change initiatives falter, mergers fail, talent takes the mercenary path, and people become disillusioned when winter and spring are not complemented by the full flowering of summer and autumn.

The leader who wants to be the difference that makes a difference cannot depend on a root system that is shallow or fragile. Business people whose work is only of the head and the hand do not, in any substantive meaning of the word, deliver leadership. By the same token, leaders whose appeal is only of the heart and spirit are on a journey to nowhere. Leaders, real leaders, those who take people where they would otherwise not go, leaders who compete successfully for people's dreams *address the head, deliver the hand, engage the heart and enrich the spirit*.

Enjoy the flight!

Chapter Ten

Critical Learning

- Leadership balance is an imperative.
- Language and imagery touch the heart.
- Champions are nourished by the opportunity to move into new space.
- To share one's self is to engage the heart.
- Learning is of the heart.
- Spirit is anchored in a passionate desire to serve.
- The glue that bonds those in a great team is spirit.
- Spirit speaks of beliefs.



Consequences

Integration success is vital, but it is only the end of the beginning. To succeed in the longer term, the new executive needs to deliver leadership. Leadership, in turn, means engaging the heart and enriching the spirit. A focus on the head and hand exclusively and the new executive is severely limiting what is possible. In a post downsizing business world, the leader who does not address the “why” and “who gains” is mismanaging his or her most important resource.



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