

# **PAMPHLET 39**

## **TWELVE STEPS FOR LEADERS**

**By Tom Heuerman, Ph.D.**  
**With Diane Olson, Ph.D.**  
**@2000**

Life is reorganizing itself as never before.

Leadership in uncertain times requires courage, service, integrity, authenticity, and intellectual vigor--character. Traditional sources for leadership development cannot meet these needs. They represent the failed status quo. So do most of the new leadership programs. They are the old repackaged in new jargon. We need a more fundamental approach that cuts to the core of our humanity. We need to become better people.

How do we evolve new leadership beliefs for such creative times? What principles provide disciplines that help us transcend the dysfunctional muck of organizational life and guide us through creative chaos to new order? How do we restore character to our lives and our organizations?

Bill Wilson, a hopeless and defeated alcoholic, faced immanent death. His elemental need to live rose from the deepest depths of his soul. He had a powerful spiritual experience that reordered his psyche. He took responsibility for himself. He never drank alcohol again, and he began, from that place of despair, a worldwide movement that has saved millions of lives.

Western society needs the same insight into its impact on all forms of life. Our mechanistic psyche begs to be recomposed. We must take responsibility for the unintended consequences of the beliefs we have lived. The tough-love approach found in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholic's Anonymous provides the concepts and structure for the conscious evolution required to save our environment, our personal humanity, and to create sustainable organizations. How ironic that the path of personal growth developed by the most hopeless and marginalized throwaways among us--the alcoholics--are the leadership development principles for the times in which we live. The following are the Twelve Steps of AA briefly translated to leadership.

## **STEP 1**

**“We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.”**

We accept that we cannot control life's natural processes: in nature, in people, in the marketplace, and in the organizations we lead. We surrender to the truth that when we try to control from our limited perspectives and influence, we create mediocre organizations filled with incomplete people. Our drive for control reflects our deep powerlessness.

Our first step is to understand that our thinking is flawed and many of our beliefs false. We internalize the harm done by the unintended consequences of living a mechanical worldview. We become learners of a new worldview.

## **STEP 2**

**“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”**

We become conscious of the insanity of our organizations, of our mass conformity, and of our quick-fix mentality. Many cannot fathom a way out of the black hole we find ourselves in. Lost, dispirited, and defiant, we might comply with the call for change but, in our hearts, we want no part of it.

This step asks the cynical, the prideful, the indifferent, the walking dead, the disillusioned, the self-righteous, and those who profit from the status quo to stop defending what doesn't work. We open our minds to new learning and our inner life to a side of ourselves long denied. We put faith in the natural emergence that will follow.

As our awareness grows, many of us want to change as we discover our untapped potential. We want to help others reach their full potential, and we want a sustainable natural world for future generations. This is the beginning of sanity.

## **STEP 3**

**“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.”**

We decide to lead in a way consistent with our new awareness and learning. A break from self-will, this step separates us from selfishness and the beliefs that alienate us from nature, people, and our spirituality. We let go of our desire to control life. We quit fighting with life and bring our intentions in line with life's natural dynamics.

We listen to our inner stirrings and our long denied inner voice and claim our freedom. We bring to consciousness our purpose in life, define our values, and create our personal vision. We listen to ourselves--not those who profit from the insecurity of others.

Step Three presents us with a crucial opportunity: to discover, trust, and heed our inner wisdom. We may think of our inner voice as our spiritual connection to our higher power--however we define it.

#### **STEP 4**

**“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”**

We look in the mirror. Many of us lead in ways detrimental to nature, to others, to ourselves, and to our organizations. We rationalize our behavior and many worship the “bottom-line.” Even the best of leaders fall short of what is possible. Many do not understand that the essence of leadership is to achieve great results by creating conditions that allows the best in others to emerge.

When we realize the unintended harm we cause, we feel guilty. If we don't, we need to look deeper. Suffering precedes growth and change. Step Four is difficult; we need courage to clean house.

#### **STEP 5**

**“Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.”**

We sit down with a trusted person and share our personal inventory. We take responsibility for ourselves, share our humanity with another, and let go of the past. We release our fear, pain, and guilt by sharing ourselves. We discover we are not unique. We also talk about our assets and plan to develop them. We reconnect with our humanity.

## **STEP 6**

**“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”**

We search our hearts and ask ourselves the transformation questions: are we **entirely** ready to do the hard inner work of our personal, conscious evolution as people and leaders?

Are we willing to learn more, change our beliefs, and lead in new and unfamiliar ways? Are we ready to suffer the embarrassments of the novice? Can we accept our humanity with all our shortcomings and potential? Do we have the courage to listen to ourselves and live our values as we go toward our vision? Will we stand alone if necessary? Or will ego and fear compel us to decline life’s invitation?

## **STEP 7**

**“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”**

The essence of this step is humility. Humility is a state of being that comes from the internalization and total acceptance, to the core of our souls, that we are not in control. With humility we open ourselves to and respect the greater natural processes of life. We understand that we need others and that we need to believe in something greater than ourselves. The truth of this reality is our hope.

## **STEP 8**

**“Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”**

We realize the importance of relationships to family, leadership, and to creative self-organization in our enterprises. In positions of power and influence, and blinded by ambition and the bottom line, our leadership may damage more people than a sick and destructive alcoholic does. We accept responsibility for the harm our obsolete beliefs and behaviors do to others. We make a thorough list of those we hurt and choose to make amends to all.

## **STEP 9**

**“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible,**

**except when to do so would injure them or others.”**

We know our negative impact on others. It is painful and frightening to know how we hurt the spirits of others despite our good intentions. Our disconnection from our fellow human beings is apparent. Often we treat others with disrespect. We make decisions for wrong and selfish reasons. We harm the careers of others to protect ourselves. We lie and cheat in our work. We withhold information from others. We take credit due others. We fail to stand up to injustice. We abuse the power entrusted to us. We apologize and change our behavior. With our amends we begin to reconnect with others.

### **STEP 10**

**“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”**

We take time daily to reflect on ourselves, our behavior, and our impact on others. We take responsibility for our actions. We are ruthless in exploring our intentions and assumptions, and we are brutal in our honesty with ourselves about our impact on others. We then take action to correct our mistakes. In the process we grow as spiritual beings and build trust and credibility with others.

### **STEP 11**

**“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”**

With prayer we ask for non-local intervention. We honor everyone’s concept of a higher power, even if different from our own. Prayer opens us and makes us one with the universe. We ponder life from the highest perspective.

Meditation prepares us to receive the non-local intervention we pray for. We listen quietly. Meditation opens us to the synchronicities around us. Meditation helps us receive the insights below the surface of daily activities and increases our mindfulness.

### **STEP 12**

**“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.”**

We “walk the talk” and give back to others. We share our stories, experiences, and learnings with others with no strings attached because we are servants to the greater whole of life. We become teachers and coaches, and we bear witness for others. At times we subordinate our personal wishes and do what is right for the larger system of which we are a part. At other times we put ourselves first. We empower others and create conditions where the talents of all can emerge.

The Twelve Steps provide a framework to integrate our human spirits into our leadership. When we do that we will have the leadership needed for the times in which we live. And we will create a sustainable way of life.

(This pamphlet is excerpted from the book manuscript “Twelve Steps for Leaders: Leadership Transformation for Uncertain Times” by Tom Heuerman, Ph.D.)