

PAMPHLET 47

THE NEW LEADERS:

FROM CONTROL TO INFLUENCE

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NOTE TO PAMPHLET READERS:

PAMPHLET 44 BEGAN A SERIES OF PAMPHLETS ON THE NEW LEADER. THE PAMPHLETS IN THE SERIES WILL BEGIN “THE NEW LEADERS....”

New leaders understand that they cannot control life’s natural processes: in nature, in people, in the marketplace, and in the enterprises they are entrusted to lead. At most they are participants in possibilities. They surrender to the truth that the more they try to control, the more they create mediocre organizations filled with compliant, incomplete, and inauthentic people who, as a result, perform at a fraction of their capability. Our desire for the illusion of control reflects our own deep fear, ignorance, incompleteness, powerlessness, and inauthenticity.

In our obsession to control, we live an insidious and powerful denial. We try mightily to impose what is unreal upon what is real and do massive damage in the process—to nature and to other human beings. We cannot control life, and we cannot change others. To try to control others is to deny and damage their spirits and their right to live an authentic life, and none of us has that right. We can only change ourselves by becoming more aware, authentic, and courageous and then we can contribute our unique gifts and influence the systems around us in life-enhancing ways.

We human beings have always known, deep down, of our powerlessness in the larger scheme of things. The fear and insecurity of our impotence in the face of dynamic natural processes much more powerful than ourselves leads to efforts to control and to convince ourselves that we are in charge. Since the

human experience began, we have tried to make sense of life and to control nature through our religions, our sciences, our addictions, and our philosophies.

In the recent past of human history, the mechanistic world-view promised to remove this insecurity from us. Many of us fell prey to this view of people and organizations as machines always fixable, controllable, and predictable. This view of life, people, and organizations is incomplete. We are not machines, and denying our humanity will not make us so.

We know the impact the mechanistic world-view has on people in organizations. We feel the alienation of being treated like objects. Corporations are machines, where management is equated with control, where employees are children, where people are motivated by fear, where change is synonymous with pain, and where emotions are forbidden. Many of us are bored, afraid, confused, alienated, and angry living in that world, and we experience those emotions as “numbness.” Is the way we are leading working for us?

This is the organizational world we created. Much of it is abusive. We are responsible for the impact this view of the world has on people, on ourselves, and on the natural world. We can change this reality if we first face it and accept responsibility for what we have done, what we are doing, and what we can do. We can no longer blame ignorance for how we lead. Powerful knowledge has been available for a long time. Leaders have, for the most part, ignored it and perpetuate a destructive system of thought.

The first step in our leadership transformation is to understand that our thinking is flawed and our mechanistic beliefs false when applied to living systems. We realize how our atomistic and fragmented beliefs (along with our egos) block the development of ourselves and of many of those who look to us for leadership, and we internalize the harm we have inflicted on others and ourselves. I believe the lack of awareness by people of how they impact others is the single most destructive force in organizational life; a mindlessness that brings forth destructive behavior that the perpetrators are unaware of.

We see reality as it is and accept personal responsibility for change. We realize that if we participated in the cause of an event, we bear our share of responsibility for the outcome and impact. This accountability is a necessary inner shift that may frighten and humiliate us. Such a personal accounting is difficult to accept. What prideful executive wants to admit failure of any kind--much less a

personal failure of leadership? What self-centered manager wants to admit to behavior destructive to the spirits of others? What employee wants to see their complicity in the system they blame for their powerlessness? We may feel lost, angry, guilty, betrayed, confused, and powerless. Reality is a tough teacher.

We internalize the craziness of a belief system and behaviors that deny so much of our aliveness--our spirit, our emotions, and our intuition--and then ignore, for the most part, the destructiveness of those aspects of ourselves when they are expressed indirectly. We grasp the insanity of a way of thinking that requires people and organizations to be mediocre and that continues to jump at every quick-fix solution put forth. A quick fix for what? To be mediocre in new and exciting ways?

We understand the harmfulness of the truth we deny, the conformity we demand, the authenticity we punish, and the responsibility we refuse. We see our organizations and ourselves in conflict between life-sustaining creative forces and the path of equilibrium and death.

We finally understand that much of what we thought about leadership is wrong. The foundation of beliefs and practices that provided meaning and structure in organizations are now understood to be false and destructive. Even if we had superficial material success, we, as leaders, realize the impact our behavior has on others and on the sustainability of our planet and organizations. We see that so much more is possible. We study and begin to learn the essence of a new world-view.

Twentieth century sciences are “proving,” in the language of the scientist, what the spirit has always known: nature is a living system and everything is interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent. Life’s natural creative processes are orderly but cannot be controlled by anyone. To try to control is to try to reverse life’s natural processes. Why would we want to do that? The mechanistic world-view is not rejected--a more encompassing understanding of life eclipses it. Newtonian science still works—for machines and linear processes—but not for living systems (including human beings and organizations).

The implications of an ecological world-view for leadership and organizational life are profound. Our eyes are opened to a new vision of life. The diversity we force into conformity is seen as the essence of life and sustainability. The truths we do not talk about are seen as essential to growth. The chaos we dampen is seen as

the source of creativity. The relationships we refuse are seen as the substance of life. The self-organization we limit is seen as the process to new growth and development. The emotions we deny are seen as life's energy from which all vitality emerges. The personal and organizational identities we neglect to get acquainted with are seen as the path to authenticity and provide the conceptual controls that guide members of our organizations toward a common destination.

Our role as leaders shifts from heroic control to authentic influence. Our responsibility is to create conditions that free life's natural processes within our organizations and to align the organization's energy around the shared identity of purpose, values, and vision.

We begin with ourselves. We come to know our beliefs, our purpose for living, and our vision. We speak them, and we live them. We honor diversity. We tell the truth. We utilize chaos. We nurture relationships. We facilitate self-organization and we feel our emotions. And we fulfill our new role with a steely inner resolve regardless of what others may think.

In time, and with a new world-view, we begin to give up our efforts to control (within ourselves and externally), and we let go of our many preconditions for life and for others. We reduce our egos intentionally, and we live our new beliefs. We don't have to know everything. We don't have to be right all the time. We don't have to have every idea and make every decision. We don't have to have certainty before we act. And we don't have to be the bully dictator for everyone else's life.

We put the good of the team, the family, and the organization ahead of our selfish wants. We stop identifying with external symbols. Ultimately we identify only with life itself. We shift our view of life from a win-lose scarcity model to a win-win world of abundance. We begin to live more intuitively. We spend more time in solitude. We are vulnerable. We find our direction within. We may use a coach to guide us along the way—someone who has done the work we are beginning. We do not gain the insight we need from costly seminars led by slick presenters who have not done their own work. Our conscious evolution cannot be purchased. We must work for it. A healthy (and reduced) ego is needed to do such difficult work.

New leaders free massive amounts of human potential and discretionary energy with powerful impacts on the enterprise. We come to realize that our authentic participation (influence) has

greater impact on the organization than our inauthentic efforts to control and change others. We honor the authenticity of every person and see their spirits flourish and their contributions to the organization grow.

We, as leaders, can create conditions for this emergence of authenticity to happen and can model the way through our own learning and development. Dumbed-down, compliant, and inauthentic people and mediocre organizations can be so much more creative and productive than they are, and organizations can be much more sustainable. And life and work can invigorate us. We do what works for us. Do we have the courage to abandon a worldview that has served its purpose and embark on a new leadership journey?

In our first difficult efforts to give up control, we might abdicate our leadership responsibilities thinking we can no longer say or do anything that might be interpreted as being controlling. We might retreat to our offices and just “let it happen.” The organization flounders, and we are disappointed and blame others for the failure of “the new ways.”

If we are bored, frustrated, stressed, or in a crisis, we may overreact and take control more than ever before. People fear we are going back to the old ways and think we are not walking the talk. We feel angry, afraid, confused, and anxious. This “relapse” is normal and part of our growth. Our trust and faith is weakest when we need them most. They will grow if we stick with it and gain experience. We learn and try again. We realize that influence is not the same as abdication.

With reflective practice, our judgment grows, and we get a feel for a middle ground and come to understand that we can still lead, but differently. Instead of telling people what to do, we ask them questions and provide them with information. We give them time to be in relationship together so that the wisdom that is in the system can emerge. We give people freedom to make decisions and to take action about the work they do, and we hold them accountable. We don't do their work for them. We teach others how to do things for themselves and require them to do so. Instead of talking we listen. Instead of trying to control people we create conditions which free them to use their capabilities. Most of all we model the change we want to see in others.

In some circumstances it is right to take charge, make decisions, and give direction. Experience teaches us when this is appropriate.

Our inner wisdom, maturity, and judgment gradually replace quick-fix leadership programs.

We see changes in people. We notice that those who have been among the walking dead for years come alive and make important new contributions. We recognize unnoticed talents in people and feel new energy in them as they make new contributions. People take new initiative, and teams perform great feats. The organization's performance improves in dramatic and unpredictable ways. We comment to others about how much people have changed. Then we realize they are changing because we are changing, and we are changing because they are changing. The power of this insight is compelling. We understand that we grow in relationship with others.

Leadership transformation is difficult and requires tremendous commitment: to new learning, feedback and dialogue, a deep examination of beliefs, and a decision to change fundamental operating assumptions. A transformation requires the development of latent capabilities, and the practice of new skills. We suffer the humiliations of the novice and develop our ability to apologize, because we will make many mistakes.

Our transformation requires action, courage, and awareness along with faith in life's natural processes. We go forward courageously into the chaos of life with wise uncertainty. This is the new leader. Why would we do this hard work? We do it because we want a sustainable world for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. Real leaders take on this hard work willingly.