

PAMPHLET 61

SPIRIT AT WORK (3)

LEADERS WHO CARE

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Caring is the essential motive.

Robert Greenleaf

While each of us is responsible for the spirit in our lives, as leaders of organizations and institutions we have the positional power to create conditions that will give others greater opportunity to expand their possibilities and sense of spirit at work. Instead of demanding conformity and compliance (mediocrity and non-being), we can assume a new role for ourselves: we can confront and support others with their freedom, responsibility, and accountability. How much easier it is to be spirited at work if the organization supports us in our efforts. We can grow, create, and contribute without having to fight every step of the way or without going underground to find limited aliveness.

We create these conditions because bringing forth potential is the right thing to do for ourselves and others and it also has huge positive impact on the results of the organization. We create these conditions because we want to contribute to the larger evolution of humanity necessary for a sustainable world. We create these conditions because we care.

Caring is, I believe, the fundamental aspect of our humanity necessary to create and lead a spirited organization. In his book, *“On Caring,”* Milton Mayeroff defined caring: “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself.” Caring is the antithesis of simply using a person to satisfy our own needs—so much the norm in organizations. Leaders who care see others as real people—not as machines, job descriptions, expense categories, or slots on an organizational chart. Committed to everyone in the organization—in good times

and in bad times--such leaders carry out their obligations as actions they want to take—not as burdens. They respond to the needs of others and enable and trust others to grow in their own time and own way.

Caring leaders encourage people to be themselves, let them make their own decisions, and help others achieve what they want. Leaders who care put the purpose, values, and vision of the organization before personal gain. They help others grow in their freedom, responsibility, and accountability. How do they do this?

They loosen boundaries, encourage dialogue, free anxiety, and use it to give life to the organization. They share information—including bad news. They talk about loss, failure, and disappointment and learn from these little deaths. They quit using bribes and threats in futile efforts to control and motivate employees.

They expect leadership at all levels. They see employee development as an opportunity for self-determination. They stop fixing others. They allow people to design their work in ways that stimulate them. They hold people accountable for developing their own capabilities for feeling stimulated by their work. They confront mediocrity. And they disconnect pay from stock prices as there is no link between compensation methods and sustainability. In other words, they get real, take on real issues, and treat others as real, mature, and responsible human beings. Do such leaders really exist? Yes, they do. I wrote about one in Pamphlet 11, “The Servant Leader.”

The change effort I wrote of in Pamphlets 59 and 60 had a pattern of caring that ran through all aspects of the work. One story exemplifies the spirit that ran through the organization. Six months after the formation of each self-managed team, we tested the teams on their group process and problem solving skills.

When they were successful they were given a financial award. The only condition was that they use the money on a team activity. One team went to northern Minnesota on a fishing trip. Another went to dinner and a casino. A team went to the horse races. One team had a Saturday night outing planned with a limousine, night clubs, and dinner reservations. The team was located near my office, and I saw and felt their excitement.

The week before their night out a team member’s brother died. He lived in California. The team member could not afford a plane ticket to go to his brother’s funeral. The team, on their own and without

fanfare, cancelled their plans and purchased an airline ticket for their teammate. He went to his brother's funeral in California.

I am not surprised at the recent corporate scandals. I saw seeds of it in the newspaper industry where I worked. I saw dishonesty. I saw corruption. I saw laziness and greed. I did not participate in it. I rebelled against the organization's shadow every day for 18 years. Therefore I know that each of us can choose our path. We are not powerless or helpless.

Those who understand organizational life and see the patterns readily observable in corporate life are not surprised by these scandals. Robert Greenleaf wouldn't be surprised. He wrote in 1976: "By default, far too much of the inevitable leadership is in the hands of the gross, the self-seeking, and the corrupt." These corporate assaults on integrity emerge as natural outgrowths of a worldview that no longer solves the problems of life that matter. Unwilling to give up the mechanistic worldview that made them rich (or promises to make them rich) people with power push old methods harder and harder. And when working harder no longer works, they choose to cheat instead of change--cheating is easier.

These villains didn't care about anything greater than their own greed—the outcome when there is no shared vision. They lacked spirit, caring, character, and competence. These people represent the extreme end of deeper patterns in the shadows of our organizational psyche: greed, elitism, entitlement, intellectual laziness, and the desire for easy quick-fixes. They lied, broke the rules, grabbed the money, and ran. They violated the sacred trust that connects leader and follower. They had power, but they were not leaders.

Many of us colluded with the mentality that led to this spiritual rotting even as we are repulsed by the extent of this wanton behavior. Who hired these people? Who glorified them? Who did their bidding? Who looked the other way? Who wanted to get rich--quick and easy? How many countless and characterless decisions, at all levels of enterprises, preceded their actions?

These corporate criminals behaved so unlike the nine men in the Quecreek Mine near Somerset, Pennsylvania recently. The miners were trapped 240 feet underground for three days. They wrote goodbye notes to their families and sealed them in a bucket. They tied themselves together so they would either live or die as a group. They huddled together to keep warm. They lifted spirits that sagged. The men never quit on one another, and no one lost hope

because they knew those above cared for them and would not abandon them.

September 11, 2001 woke us to a reconsideration of what defines heroes and heroines. On that day when terrorists flew jetliners outside the boundaries of humanity and into the Pentagon and the towers of the World Trade Center everything changed.

As most of us sat transfixed in front of our television sets, we saw new heroes and heroines emerge: the women and men of New York City's fire department, police department, and the emergency medical technicians. We learned of heroic passengers on United Airlines flight 93 who fought their hijackers and probably saved the United States Capitol from destruction as they themselves died. These heroes and heroines believed in something greater than themselves. They cared. Though afraid, they found the courage to act and made us swell with pride. Their courage asked us to be courageous.

These everyday heroes, unlike the cowardly gangsters of the corporate world, were real servants who cared and who gave of themselves for others--often paying the ultimate in personal cost. They demonstrate the new models for our leaders--true servants of humanity--everyday people of honor and integrity who connect with the spirits of all and face difficult challenges with courage.

Suddenly many of those we looked up to as our saviors in the corporate world don't look so heroic to us. Their outer gloss suffers in contrast to the inner character of the new heroes. We see the villains with clarity, we see ourselves with clarity, and we see more clearly the possibilities for all of us. Our humanity calls to us. Do we hear it?

I wrote in Pamphlet 23, "Leading in Chaos," that many leaders in organizations are the wrong people to lead in the times in which we live (Pamphlet 17). They lack the maturity and the heart to lead in creative times that call for organizational artists—not mechanics (see Pamphlet 24).

Mature leaders do not run and hide from themselves or frantically conceal symptoms of systemic problems with cosmetic solutions. They face their anxiety with courage and honesty and transform the dangers they sense to opportunities. They are noble visionaries who also see brutal reality as it is. Their artistry is shown in their ability to move from reality to vision with people who choose to follow.

They confront squarely the genuine problems enterprises face today: incongruent thought processes, problems of vision and values, the management of change, issues of mediocrity and organizational potential, questions of sustainability, the truth of leadership capability, and matters of freedom, responsibility, and accountability. Guided by the heart, caring and mature leaders have great integrity.

Robert Greenleaf wrote that caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built. Our society is unraveling and has been for some time. The actions we saw on September 11, 2001 and at the Quecreek Mine more recently shined a light on the best that we can be. Calls for caring, creativity, compassion, and moral courage, September 11, 2001 and Quecreek contrast so vividly with the darkness we see all around us.

It would be easy to not care about the corporate world. I vowed many times to abandon it. But care we must if we want to have a good society. Caring is difficult. It requires hard work, self-sacrifice, and tough-mindedness. Caring requires tough-love that is often misunderstood along with wisdom and discipline.

I believe that more of us are like the heroes and heroines of September 11, 2001 and the miners at the Quecreek Mine than the shamed corporate executives at Enron, Qwest, WorldCom, Adelphia Communications, and others.

I hope that we will take our organizations and institutions and make them things of beauty that we are proud to be a part of. To destroy and then create our organizations, we must first care and make our caring count for something great. We can rise from mediocrity and do battle with our collective shadow. We must settle for nothing less than leaders who care and exude character and maturity as they rebel against the beliefs and models that no longer work. We must support them as they lead. Then we might achieve **Spirit at Work**.

The painful calls for change will continue—more destructive and more frequent—until we listen.

Future pamphlets will explore the elements of **Spirit at Work** including those that threaten its sustainability.