

# PAMPHLET 64

## HOLLOW MEN

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We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw, Alas!  
Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion...  
T.S. Eliot

Much of our “disconnect in life” is caused by men because we raise little boys to grow up to be disconnected adults. Our worldview teaches us that men are separate and distinct from nature and from others. This philosophy of life even teaches men that we can disconnect from our spirit and emotions and rely on our rational minds only. This worldview entitles us to control and dominate nature and others. We believe we are responsible only for ourselves and others must fend for themselves. The fittest survive and the rest must be deficient in some way.

In our organizational lives we learn that success and promotions often go to the strongest and most ruthless--not the most caring, creative, or competent. Isolated employees identify with and defend their fragmented jobs and/or departments. Interactions with others are often dishonest, conforming, competitive, paternalistic, and politically correct. Often we create enemies who we demonize and scapegoat to justify our own bad behavior. Such beliefs alienate us from others and ourselves and allow us to harm people with no sense of personal responsibility. How is this view of life working for us?

When I contemplated my departure from the corporate world, I looked around the company:

I saw the politically correct group of achievers who were the new “in” crowd. They were smart, articulate, non-threatening to the publisher, and bragged of their achievements gained often with

smoke and mirrors and by deceptive and destructive political adeptness. Highly competitive they craved power and sacrificed their values and authenticity to gain rewards and prominence. They looked different from their predecessors but were part of the same monoculture bred to maximize self-serving, short-term, and often phony results at the expense of the diversity and flexibility necessary for sustainability. They were the hollow men disconnected from others. More and more women joined this group as they gained prominence in the organization.

I saw men, middle aged and older, who came to work every day but did not, and were not expected to, contribute beyond minimal levels. Some were stuck in jobs not big enough for them, their potential unfulfilled, and their moods bitter and cynical. They chose to stay for security and sacrificed their spirits. Others were in jobs appropriate for their capabilities but their work long ago lost purpose, and they seemed lifeless. Still others did not manage their own personalities and did not know how to keep their spirits ignited. They were the walking dead disconnected from themselves.

Then there were those promoted far beyond their capabilities and their ability to make a meaningful contribution. Their daily task was to present an appearance of contribution while they struggled mightily to maintain their dignity. These people lived off the accomplishments of others. They choose humiliation, blind obedience, and inauthenticity in exchange for a false sense of importance. They were the pseudo-leaders disconnected from self and others.

And then there were the useless corporate suckups inauthentically connected to those with power, and, therefore, connected to no one. You know them. Every organization has them. They always say the right thing, please their bosses and abuse their employees, and change directions like a politician in front of a television camera. They sit in the front row when the boss speaks—in the back when a colleague talks. They are appearance without substance. They have no plans, anger, thoughts, or opinions of their own. For them, the truth resides in whoever has power in the moment. They have a false sense of security and significance borrowed from those they suck-up to.

The men in these groups, wherever they may be and because of their fear, withhold their deepest gifts from a world that needs those gifts desperately. They are organizational models for a world that no longer exists. They do not contribute to sustainable enterprises.

I also noticed how many of the alive and genuine contributors in the company had resigned under the new leadership. Others who stayed fought constantly, as I had done, against the system that tried to deny them their authenticity. The hollow men were in charge and would destroy our efforts to evolve the company because they could not bear to evolve themselves; I decided to leave.

When the purposeless and conforming would be leaders of the corporate world leave the office for the day, they look good. They wear the right clothes, drive trendy cars, and live in fashionable neighborhoods. They idle in the same traffic jams every night. They read the popular books, say the politically-correct things, and go to the “hip” places for their latte. They have a sad wife they cannot connect with and children who scamper from activity to activity as fathers avoid emotional connection with them too.

Decisions are based on how they will appear to others. They try to control those around them—many in emotionally abusive ways, and they blame their victims for their abuse. The day comes when the wives of the hollow men reclaim their voices and leave. These devastated men then have the gall to blame the wives whose spirits they ravaged for not telling them how their behavior affected the family—everything is always about them. Some of these men change, others repeat the pattern again, and a few kill themselves and complete the disconnection they were raised to make.

Many men, inside and outside of the corporate world, feel empty. Many have deep wounds. Many behave badly from their woundedness. Men, like women, get hurt in a paternalistic system where women submerge their needs in service of others and men strive to achieve to gain unfulfilling conditional love and acceptance. So many men long to be themselves as they fear not being loved if they are. So they continue to strive to be other than themselves and lose more and more of who they are along the way.

Countless men have no idea of what they feel. Many have no clear sense of what they want. Numberless men do not know how their words and actions impact others. Most of them look to others and to activity to fill the vacuum within them.

The friendless seek not to be outstanding in real ways but to fit in and fear ostracism most of all. Authenticity is sacrificed for a false sense of acceptance and importance. We raise boys to be this way as men. We teach that to be a man is to be disconnected from self

and others. We call them “well adjusted.”

This unjust emptiness becomes boredom, then futility, and finally despair and its destructive power that hides behind silence and strength. So much of the external world reflects this disconnection: divorce statistics; pedophile priests; snipers who murder; corporate greed and corruption; terrorists who paralyze nations; men who abuse women, children, and employees; gluttonous and addictive consumption of the environment; and on and on across all boundaries and at all levels.

The level of abuse and violence perpetrated by men on nature, women, children, and upon each other is so apparent and so staggers the soul that how we raise little boys must be talked about. We must see the fear and pain inside of so many men (often masked by bad behavior) and help them deal with their wounds and inability to cope with emotions and intimacy--so few men can share joy, fear, pain, grief, anger, or sorrow, with others. So many avoid the terrifying emotional world they experience as unpredictable and uncontrollable. At the same time men must be accountable for the damage they do. Their victims need to stand up, speak up, and refuse to collude with the conspiracy of silence.

Little boys do not get to choose the system they are raised within. But as grown men we are responsible for ourselves and our behavior, and we can choose to change how we live. I think of my friend Bob Terry (author of *Authentic Leadership* and *Zone Leadership*) who was the voice of authenticity before he passed away recently. I remember my boss Chuck Freeman (Pamphlet 11) and his decency, kindness, and compassion. I pay attention as my father models how to live in ones twilight years (Pamphlet 58). I think of my ex-father-in-law and his humility and pride of craftsmanship. My friend John Johnson sees life in its depths.

Men can be whole; these men are models as I—a once tough-guy secret service agent and union-busting executive whose intensity scared others--do the work I need to do to be a complete and connected human being.

Many men need to stop running, take responsibility for their lives, repair relationships (with others, nature, and most of all themselves), learn to treat themselves well, and move toward their potential as human beings as they model how to live for their sons and grandsons.

Below are 6 questions I ask myself periodically. The answers

require me to gather feedback and grow in self-awareness.

1. What do I feel?
2. How do I impact the spirits of those around me?
3. What do I value?
4. What do I want in my life?
5. How will I regain my ability to connect with others?
6. What actions (including creative idleness) will I take to make my values real?

Many of us need help to discover the answers to these difficult questions that lead into the shadows and down the many roads of self-awareness. I had and have much help from wise friends and colleagues. The healthiest seek that help. Such change is difficult and possible. The outcome is to reconnect with life and feel alive.

Women have their own issues. Many women live hollow, incomplete, and inauthentic lives. Women and men come from the same paternalistic social system that robbed women of their voice and men of the ability to connect. Our task is for men and women to find their authenticity, connect again, and together change the system that harmed each—not to fight for control of that system (and simply reverse roles and afflictions), take on the worst aspects of one another, or blame one another without seeing our collusion in the reality of our relationships. We together are responsible for who we are, for what we do to each other, and for who we will become.

I have a son and four grandsons. I don't want them to be rigidly stoic, stable, and independent. I want them to be vulnerable, emotional, and able to lean on others when appropriate. I don't want them to be tough and macho all the time. I want them to be able to choose wisely how to behave in different situations. I don't want them to feel that they have to be first all the time. I want them to know how to cooperate and let others lead. I want them to have empathy for others and to show warmth and sympathy. I want them to connect with nature, others, and themselves. I want the same for my leaders.

More than good men, I want my son, leaders, and grandsons to be good human beings and great warriors.

A Masai elder described a great *morani* (warrior):

When the moment calls for fierceness a good *morani* is very ferocious. And when the moment calls for

kindness, a good morani is utterly tender. Now what makes a great morani is knowing which moment is which.

The millions of men and women who today do the hard inner work to redefine who they are and who model and nurture completeness for girls and boys, within and outside of organizations, are the real leaders in the world today.

RECOMMENDED READING: HOW CAN I GET THROUGH TO YOU? By Terrence Real.