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Building inspiring organisations

A wholehearted interview with Dr. Lance Secretan



What is the link between happy, inspired, content employees and corporate success?

I think that people who are inspired – and they are inspired by leaders that create an inspiring environment – are happy. Spirituality, understood as the sacredness not only of all human beings but of all things as well, is the underlying force of all that. If we treat everybody as sacred, respect them and take care of them, then they will be inspired and joyful.

... well, ok. But given the right economic surrounding then inspired happy employees add even more to corporate success ...

I don't think that the environment really makes a big difference, if you mean the financial environment. I think you can say that there are plenty of people today under pressure, but still happy. They don't like the situation but are joyful and happy and dealing with it.

Many corporations – as the term already indicates – treat their employees just as a utility, human capital. But is the creation of value not meant for humans, created by humans and not just as a substitute to capital? Because in classical economic theory the two factors – capital and work – substitute each other. There is no, inherent value matrix ...

I'm not very keen on the idea of human capital. I prefer the idea of intellectual capital, which in my understanding is much more a tangible sort of thing. There is a science called Human Resource Accounting which is a way of evaluating the value of employees, who really are assets in the sense that you invest in them and they appreciate, or if you don't invest in them, they depreciate. But to treat people by defining them as "human resources", for me, is treating people like a thing rather than the heart of the organisation. We are here to serve people.

Tell me some figures and facts on how your work successfully changes the environment the value of the clients you worked with.

Well, the average result from the work with our clients is that the staff turnover, the number of employees leaving, reduces by 50 per cent. And the average result on the bottom line is a 50 per cent increase in profits. So, there is a very tangible result in both the retention level of employees and the profitability of the business which dramatically improves. It makes sense of course that when people stop leaving, then the cost of replacing them declines and also the wisdom and the quality of the work increases because they have been there longer and they know what they are doing.

Not everybody shares the same values. What value structure do most of your clients have and how does that relate to enabling your work? I don't think for example, that you would take any client.

I have a very simple way of saying this. We only work with clients whose business is life affirming. So, obviously, we will not do business with anybody who produces weapons or cigarettes. Now, there are some marginal areas, certain chemical companies for example ...

... some pharmaceutical companies ...

Yes, you can argue that, sometimes they make good things and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they have good intentions and sometimes they don't. It's the same with energy: It depends on how the energy is created. If they destroy habitats, we wouldn't work for them. We are very selective in that way. Unfortunately many of those companies have a lot of money. So they keep coming and wanting us to work for them. But we won't do it.

That's really interesting. I am coming across that for the first time. I have already interviewed quite a lot of business men and women, such as change agents, and they always kind of evaded the question. If you consider socially responsible investment, for example if you don't say no to anything, you are a whore to every client. And of course it speaks for your

work and your success. So, you have more clients consulting you than you have to accept?

Well, most companies are good. Even if they don't make good things, their intentions are often good. Look at the oil business: they don't want to destroy tribes, communities and the environment but they are not careful enough, they make mistakes. So, if they want to clean up their mess afterwards, they are still life affirming – they care.

Let's talk about integrity. As you put such a strong emphasis on the term, how would you define it?

Integrity is one's inner honesty, our internal compass, living with the highest values inside and adhering to them.

... and acting according to them would then be authentic?

Well authenticity is not necessarily integrity. Authenticity means, thinking, saying, feeling and doing the same thing. It's more about internal alignment and being consistent with other people. If you are authentic then your actions are clearly true and consistent with your inner values. Integrity is more about honesty, truthfulness and trust. Integrity is being reliable and values-centered.

What is the most pressing problem for the whole world, or at least for the business world? What might be a solution and how might your work contribute to that?

The biggest problem is a lack of understanding about what is important. The prevailing view is that what is most important is meeting the shareholder needs and maximising share price, maximising the financial value to the organisation. But that is not the most important criteria for running any organisation. Yet, somehow we are locked into that thinking. We teach it in business schools. We practice it and we are rewarding it with the prevailing system in Wall Street and the financial markets. And the whole structure is making sure it remains so. Whereas the real value of an organisation is to create human wealth and abundance. It's

not necessarily money, but spiritual abundance, health etcetera. All the things that human beings yearn for and the environment needs. That is the awareness of really exceptional companies. They care for the environment and try to make it better, not worse. Great companies and great leaders know that and act on it. There are some companies that are very prepared to take decisions that will hurt the share price but will help the planet. And in the long term they will be the winners.

And in how far does your work contribute to the solution?

We start by mapping the spiritual health of the organisation. We check the history of the company, because we want to know what the passion, the heritage of the past, is. If we want to change the organisation, we want to keep those good things that are the DNA of the organisation.

We want to create an inspiring organisation. We want to add to the existing level of inspiration. We teach the CASTLE principles (see box). And they, themselves are inspiring for people. They want to live them. And we ask the company to have a dream which is something that rises far above the normal mission, vision and values. It's a much, much bigger idea.

The dream is about how you want to change the world?

We have a whole scientific process of intelligence-gathering and research which eventually leads to the definition of a dream. And then we introduce a program which helps the organisation and their leadership team to identify, realise and sustain the dream. Sustaining the dream is really about reaching as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. It's all about how to be inspiring – inspiring to each other, inspiring to employees, inspiring to customers, to regulators and third parties and people at arm's length. Even inspiring to tax inspectors! And it includes even your competitors and people in alternative businesses that could be considered being a threat.

We always come back to the same thing: is it inspiring and are you

inspiring? If you are inspiring then everything else is going to start settling into place. If it's not inspiring, don't do it. Or, if you can't do it in an inspiring way, don't do it. If you have to shut a factory, do it in an inspiring way, that inspires people, even though it is sad news that must be imparted and even though it entails the loss of jobs. This will inspire them to be loyal and committed to you even long after they have left your company. And this will inspire them to speak well about you, when they find a new job. If they are inspired, they are going to create new business opportunities for you.

For more information visit

www.secretan.com

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lance_Secretan

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_resource_accounting

Acknowledged as one of the most insightful and provocative leadership teachers of our time, best-selling author Lance Secretan is revolutionising the way that men and women integrate inspiration and leadership. His teaching and writing on conscious leadership, is radical and ingenious and has been hailed as among the most original, authentic and effective contributions to leadership thinking currently available.

Individuals and entire organisations have experienced remarkable transformations through his unique wisdom and approach. Thirty of Fortune's Most Admired Companies, and 11 of Fortune's Best Companies to Work for in America, are his clients. Leadership Excellence has ranked him among the top 100 Most Influential Thinkers on Leadership in the World.

Dr. Lance Secretan is one of the world's foremost thinkers about leadership and a renowned pioneer in innovative methods of inspiring people and organisations. As part of a Fortune 100 company Lance was the CEO and builder of a global business, then used this experience as an acclaimed business school professor, and today advises leaders directly and through a gifted worldwide faculty. His work is changing the lives of people and transforming companies and revolutionising the way they think about leadership.

The six C.A.S.T.L.E. Principles

1. Courage

Being brave enough to reach beyond the boundaries created by our existing, often deeply held, limitations, fears and beliefs. Initiating change in our lives - of any kind - happens only when we are courageous enough to take the necessary action.

2. Authenticity

Committing oneself to show up and be fully present in all aspects of life, removing the mask and becoming a real, vulnerable and intimate human being, a person without self-absorption who is genuine and emotionally and spiritually connected to others.

3. Service

Focusing on the needs of others by listening to them, identifying their needs, and meeting them. Being inspiring, rather than following a self-focused, competitive, fear-based approach.

4. Truthfulness

Listening openly to the truth of others and refusing to compromise integrity or to deny universal truths - even when avoiding the truth might, on the face of it, especially in testing times, seem easier.

5. Love

Embracing the underlying oneness with others and life. Relating to, and inspiring, others and touching their hearts in ways that add to who you both are as persons.

6. Effectiveness

Being capable of, and successful in, achieving the physical, material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual goals we set in life.

For a detailed description of the biochemical effects of love and fear, see, Lance H. K. Secretan, *Reclaiming Higher Ground: Creating Organisations that Inspire the Soul*, Toronto, 1996, Chapter 5, "The Alchemy of the Soul."



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