



BECOMING A CONSCIOUS LEADER

BY LANCE H. K. SECRETAN

There are two kinds of leaders: those who inspire, and those who don't.

We would all like to be inspiring leaders, but much obsolete thinking gets in our way. Among the many blocks is our resistance to becoming conscious leaders who are “awake”—we cling to past theories and behaviors and resist the natural flow and evolution of the needs of followers, heedless to the yearning of their hearts.

We remain unconscious, and therefore, limited beings as long as we continue to measure our “reality” only through our senses, believing that the only things that are real are those that we can experience, observe or measure. Consciousness is a profound understanding of a universal reality far beyond and outside ourselves, beyond what stimulates us. When Maxwell Bondenheim wrote, “H. L. Mencken suffers from the hallucination that he is H. L. Mencken. There is no cure for a disease of that magnitude,” he could have been writing about any of us instead of the great 20th Century writer—except that there is a cure—it is to understand that there is much, much more to this Universe than that which inflates our egos or occupies our thoughts. Consciousness is a universal energy, which has always been present, even though for the last three hundred years it has been lost to many. It is the capacity, not just in humans, to be in awe, wonder and radical admiration of the glory of all that is. Consciousness is a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of everything, knowing that every action,

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thought or statement affects the universe—we do nothing in isolation. Even the most trivial immoral acts reach into the Universe in unseen ways and places. And every act of love strengthens the fabric of the Universe. We are one, like it or not. We are brothers and sisters to each other and every living thing that walks, crawls, flies, swims, climbs, grows, erupts, flows, rains, shines or dies. When we act fully in this knowledge, when we go beyond the thought of it, when we *are* this knowledge, then, and only then, we are on the long path towards becoming conscious leaders.

What is *Consciousness*? Perhaps we could begin by describing what it *isn't*. Consciousness is the opposite of our dominant cultural paradigm: Rationalism. The “Rational mind” believes that:

- Success is measured in material terms;
- Self-worth is gauged in comparison to others;
- Feelings should be kept to ourselves;
- Metrics and the bottom line are the main arbiters of achievement;
- Anything that cannot be scientifically observed and validated is not real or valuable;
- We are each separate individuals, competing with each other and needing to “look out for number one”, and grow our own “slice of the pie”;
- The world is a dangerous place filled with evil and malevolence, from which we need to protect ourselves;
- Violence and aggression are necessary methods for negotiating the hazards of life and motivating performance;
- Fear and motivation are valuable means of managing and leading. Notions like love, eco-interdependence, spirit or soul, absolute truth and the divine are the province of philosophers, idealists and the naïve—not



business people. As the old Rationalist argument goes, “If you want a friend, get a dog.”

Consciousness is the opposite of all of these. The pathologies of society—crime, drugs and alcohol, violence, racism, fear, exclusion, bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, pollution, competition and self-interest are the symptoms of a Rational society, or stated another way, the absence of consciousness. The Rational mind sees the world as a collection of individual objects and Western science uses this intellectual framework to analyze, survive and make sense of the Universe. The Conscious Mind starts from the position that the Universe is one whole, and makes sense of life by appreciating the interconnectedness of everything and everyone with the whole. Consciousness is the awareness that we are simply part of a magical, flowing whole—like individual molecules of H₂O in the river of life. Consciousness is being awake to the mystical and ineffable aspects of being alive, recognizing a higher power; an inner knowing that life is bigger than any—or even all—of us.

The Rational mind sees a world of scarcity and responds with fear. The Conscious mind sees a world of abundance and responds with love. The Rational mind describes compassion and caring for people as “fluff”, “touch-feely”, “lovey-dovey”, “soft-stuff”, The Conscious mind sees compassion and caring for people as the juice—even the purpose and necessity—of life. The Rational mind reasons that an imbalance between work and life is the means that is justified by the ends. On the other hand, the Conscious mind understands that everything in the Universe, including work and life must be balanced and integrated, that there is a season for everything. The Conscious mind therefore balances and integrates thinking and feeling; profit and people; wisdom and learning; ego and spirit; now and the future; rich and poor; the sacred and the secular. The Conscious Leader seeks to achieve a state of grace with others and the entire Universe and is in love with every moment, person, living thing and divine experience. The Conscious Leaders, when fully present, is an evolved being.



For whom would you prefer to work – the Rational, unconscious leader, or the Conscious Leader?

A few beliefs that inform the thinking of the Conscious Leader:

- That we are ensouled beings sharing a human experience here on earth.
- That our soul is in us, and of us, and beyond us, as human beings, and that our ego or personality is held within our soul-self.
- We can also say that we are engaged in the process of soul/self retrieval—that is, that we are seeking and inviting our soul essence into our awareness.

Your soul is the priestess of memory, selecting, sifting, and ultimately gathering your vanishing days toward presence. This liturgy of remembrance, literally re-membering, is always at work within you.

John O'Donohue

- That there is uniqueness, an essential self within us, that deeply desires to be lived into, and that our sole purpose is to hear the inner voice that calls and to heed it...and then to weave that into our leadership practice.
- That the path to self-retrieval is by way of intentionality. In aligning our intention—that energy that beckons and lovingly waits and listens, we can call



forth our daemon, our soul purpose, our soul essence. The daemon is the carrier of our destiny.

- The shape of each soul is different. There is a unique destiny for each of us to live.

- That we come into this world in human form with a calling and a destiny, as well as a definite individual character. Our life experiences distract us from “knowing” this, and often much of our adult life is dedicated to re-calling our sense of destiny or purpose.

- We can trace our way back to our essential character and calling through our life stories—through uncovering the basic plot of our life story and our sense of destiny.

In my book, *Inspire: What Great Leaders Do*, I include in the definition of inspiration which includes such phrases as: “to infuse with an encouraging influence... stimulation by divinity, an idea or passion... a relationship between souls, which is other-focused and creates an environment wherein both people sense a power beyond the two—a higher power... and wherein we experience love, passion and joy bursting from our hearts”.

It is through the creation of this relationship that the questions which we ask and the responses we receive allow us to discover that which is just beyond our current awareness, that which inspires those we lead by more clearly encouraging others to live fully into their gifts and in line with their calling.



Exercise in Deepening Empathy:

“Walk a mile in my moccasins”

Choose a partner. Find an area where you can walk easily in a straight line for about 20-30 feet. Stand side-by-side. Choose a leader and a follower. The leader sets out and walks at their normal pace and stride. For the first 15 seconds, the follower observes. The follower matches the walking pace, stride and style of the leader to the best of their ability. Continue walking in this way until the follower has internalized a sense of the walking style of their partner. Switch roles, and repeat the exercise. Discuss what you learned about each other, about yourself.

Notes:



Exercise in Sacred Listening:

One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences. Often secrets are not revealed in words, they lie in the silence between the words or in the depth of what is unsayable between two people.

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“What am I hearing?”

Sit quietly and take a few deep breaths. Gently close your eyes or gaze softly at a spot just in front of you. Become aware of the sounds around you. Take a few minutes to listen.

Open your eyes and describe what you heard.

Now again close your eyes or gaze softly in front of you. Listen this time to the sound itself. Really hear the sounds around you.

Open your eyes and describe what you heard.

Again close your eyes and this time take the sound in and move into the sound. Become one with the sounds. Experience their resonance in your being, and be with the sounds around you.



Open your eyes and describe this experience of listening and hearing.

Notes:

Making the Shifts: How May I Serve You?

We acknowledge that we are committed to serving others. And yet, it is not always clear what this means exactly. If we reflect on the back wheel Primary Values in the [Values-centered Leadership® model](#), we serve best by listening and then acting constructively on what we have heard.

If we remember that each of us is ensouled, and that our purpose is to recover and discover that soul essence that is within us all, to invite ourselves and others to listen to and heed the inner voice of our calling, we will be better able to serve each other. And when we are able to view each other from a sense of wonder, and see the beauty in others, we will inevitably love them. And when we are in that loving space with another—that Sanctuary—we experience the flow of inspiration between another and ourselves.