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Notes from
Spirited Leading and Learning
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[A collection of essays / articles written over the course of a fifteen years.]

Part I
1 -- An Invitation to the Dance

The proper name for what we are talking about is not management and not leadership, but 'managerial leadership.' The worldwide need for new ideas and changed ways of working, in the midst of extreme turbulence and rapid change, demands that we think of the activity as leadership. But unlike some kinds of leaders, the leaders this book is concerned with stay around. They work in the systems they are trying to change. They also have to manage these systems and keep them as stable and serviceable as possible. Since the leading and managing cannot be separated, I will be discussing managerial leaders throughout the book.

Managerial leadership by its very nature is not an applied science. It is concerned with a much wider range of elements and exists in a much wider range of situations than science can begin to keep up with. Continual change further invalidates the applied science model. Finally, since managerial leaders are constantly creating, stewarding, and arbitrating values, they are engaged in matters of judgment and wisdom, not scientific distinctions. …

Managerial leadership is very down-to-earth and situational, and yet it has to be understood in terms of timeless themes of power and friendship and choice and responsibility and community. It is a new kind of liberal art and needs to be understood as such. …

We are talking about an activity that is an elusive blend of thought and action, of individual and group behavior, of abstract and concrete focus, of problem solving and problem finding, of creativity and routine, of economics and humanities, of societal contribution and self-advancement. The learning process must be viewed as a lifelong concern: that is not an option -- except to too many management educators, who are not presenting their subject matter as though it were going to be part of lifelong development.

Finally, various of these essays try to show that managerial leadership is not a secular enterprise: in a whole host of ways, it is better understood as embodying and expressing some of our highest aspirations -- aspirations that routinely extend outside of local material projects and become expression of the meaning of our lives. (p 3 - 5)

2 -- Process Wisdom for a New Age

** In 'Postscript,' written seven years after his original essay [*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*], Kuhn reconsidered the meaning of the idea of a paradigm. He proposed *disciplinary matrix* as a better description of the phenomenon he had in mind. He suggested that a disciplinary matrix is composed of four basic elements: (1) *symbolic*

generalization, the ways that problems within the paradigm are posed and solved (that is, the formulations that are taken as sensible); (2) *metaphysical assumptions*, the taken-as-given beliefs about what shall be treated as real; (3) *values*, which embody the basic priorities and choices of what problems to pursue and what social ends to serve; and (4) *exemplars*, those worked-out approaches and solutions that display the whole worldview as a coherent gestalt. (p 8)

The best among us are living proof that we have been saying the wrong thing, for the best among us have understood in our own ways, dim and acute, florid and dry, spare and prolix, what the enterprise is really about: the enterprise is really about what it means *to be in the world with responsibility*. In choosing this phrase to characterize the situation of manager or leader, I draw heavily on the European existentialist tradition, most notably on Martin Heidegger …. (p 13)

… 'media-ease' is the capacity to absorb and express one's experience through a variety of media -- media that involved both the left and right hemispheres of the brain and the limbic and reptilian levels as well as the neocortical. Media-ease is comfort and pleasure with the variety of windows we are endowed with as people. The old paradigm says that knowledge and truth are learned and expressed through the verbal, linear-logical windows alone. Everything else is 'style' and as such is too unique for scientific laws to encompass. The new paradigm knows something different: the experience of being-in-the-world-with-responsibility and action on behalf on one's existence -- 'effectiveness,' if you will -- depends on media-ease. At the point of action, the artificial split between true knowledge and style dissolves. (p 20-21)

I do not know exactly what the developed alternative [to the established leadership paradigm] will be, but I suggest that we all have intuitions of its nature. … The themes are at least four in number, which together are beginning to comprise a developed alternative. The first is existence, the second is openness and relationality, the third is the nature of consciousness itself, and the fourth is spirituality. The old paradigm of objectivist science ignores all four and declares them specious when their relevance is asserted. This is why the developed alternative will be a new fundamental paradigm, rather than just a slight modification or enrichment of the traditional view. (p 23-24)

Every time we say what ought to be, every time we value this over that, our choice traces back to an implicit vision of an order and a moral scheme that lies outside material existence. Somehow, we just know that what we are doing is the right thing to do.
Many of us skillfully evade this intuition. We would prefer to believe that our choices can be defended by referring to facts and validated theories right here on earth, that we do not need any revelations to anchor our truths. (p 29)

Part II -- Leading
3 The Purposing of High-Performing Systems

Today's news often occurs because someone did something or failed to do something at the strategic level months or even years ago. … *The thesis of this chapter is that the definition and clarification of purposes is both a fundamental step in effective*

strategic management and a prominent feature of every high-performing system I have ever investigated. (p 37)

    ** Here is what I have found out about high-performing systems (HPSs):

1. HPSs are clear on their broad purposes and on nearer-term objectives for fulfilling their purposes. …
2. Commitment to these purposes is never perfunctory, although it is often expressed laconically. …
3. Teamwork in HPSs is focused on the task. …
4. Leadership in HPSs is strong and clear. It is not ambivalent. …
5. HPSs are fertile sources of inventions and new methods within the scope of the task they have defined and within the form they have chosen. …
6. HPSs are clearly bounded from their environments, and a considerable amount of energy, particularly on the part of leaders, is usually devoted to maintaining thee boundaries. …
7. Proposition 6 leads to another finding -- that HPSs are often seen as a problem by entities in their environment, even those entities that have a great deal of power over them. …
8. Above all, HPSs are systems that have 'jelled,' even though the phenomenon is very difficult to talk about. (p 39 - 41)

    In my own experience with management groups, I frequently encounter an impatience, even an exasperation, with discussion of basic purposes. It is as if leaders would rather believe that these matters are understood once and for all by organization members, or that the ongoingness occurs by a kind of osmosis -- but that, in any case, the leaders have no responsibility to creatively revivify purposes. (p 43)

    ** … all the behavior we are talking about needs a name. I propose the word *purposing* to refer to that continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leadership that has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organization's basic purposes.

1. Purposing occurs in relation to the expectations of those who own or charter the system. ..
2. Purposing is seen in the articulation of the grounds for basic strategic decisions. …
3. Purposing is seen in leaders' accounts of the meaning of the system's daily activity. …
4. Purposing is evident in decisions NOT to do things. …
5. Purposing differentiates the organization from other superficially similar organizations. …
6. Purposing is the expression of what the leadership wants.
7. Purposing in some sense entails the mythologizing of oneself and the organization. (p 46 - 48)

    I believe that three characteristics appear 100 percent of the time in the actions of leaders of HPSs. I think these three characteristics and their interrelationships have profound implications for the world of organizations and organizational leaders, not because they are such esoteric or mysterious factors, but because they are so well known that they are apparently easily overlooked.

1. Leaders of HPSs put in extraordinary amounts of *time*.
2. Leaders of HPSs have very strong *feelings* about the attainment of the system's purposes.
3. Leaders of HPSs *focus* on key issues and variables. (p 49)

It is of great importance that these leaders put in large amounts of both microtime and macrotime. Microtime is the hour-to-hour, day-to-day kind of investment. Less frequently noted is macrotime: leaders of HPSs tend to stay in their jobs for many years; they do not simply 'pass through.' They make a large commitment of both microtime and macrotime. (p 51)

** The time-feeling-focus idea leads to the final observation that a leader's style does not seem to determine the level of the system's performance. … for the most part, all this interest in style is beside the point *in high-performing systems*.

I have seen every style I can conceive of in the leadership of HPSs. … What the theory described in this chapter says to the would-be leader is 'Seek constantly to do what is right and what is needed in the system (focus). Do it continually in terms of your energy (time). Put your whole psyche into it (feeling)." This is the normative lesson I derive from studying HPS leaders. (p 60-61)

4 -- Visionary Leadership

We define *vision* as an expression that does not merely describe why an organization exists and what products and services it intends to deliver. A vision is a portrayal of an organization's intended activities and character in vivid terms that capture the organization's human meaning and value. A vision is full of possibility. … a vision … needs to be interwoven in leadership. Put another way, leadership behavior that is not infused with vision is not truly leadership. (p 64-65)

Ask people to recall the best organizational experience they've ever had, and they don't just remember a 'job,' an 'assignment,' or something they did for a while because they needed the money or because it was a stepping-stone to something else. They remember the fullness of the impact of the organization on them. They remember how it filled up their lives -- how they lived it, slept it, breathed it. (p 67)

** 'An executive ought to want something,' said the late David S. Brown, long-time professor of public administration at George Washington University. Brown's remark is deceptively simple. Behind it are many years of observing executives in both the public and private sectors who don't seem to want anything in particular. They are content, apparently, to preside over the system pretty much as they find it. (p 74)

… the following processes can be expected to play an important role in a successful visioning workshop:
1. Create fruitful interaction. …
2. Create greater team feeling. …
3. Create perspective on organizational issues. …
4. Make leaders accessible. …
5. Expose and work through conflicts. …

6. Uncover and highlight feelings. …
7. Determine next steps and reentry back home. …
8. Institutionalize this process for creating and re-creating vision. (p 87-89)

5 -- Notes on 'Running an Organization'

Running an organization means this to me: *repeatedly and successfully exercising influence on others in a dignifying and empowering way on behalf of the variety of objectives, priorities, and constraints existing in the organization, using many different kinds of knowledge, common sense, and skill.* The phrase 'running an organization' is deliberately intended to be as nonacademic and non-theoretical as possible. (p 98)

Running an organization is *not* the sum of a set of competencies. (p 99)

** There are at least five broad principles that I think should suffuse any degree program or training program that purports to be about leading and managing organizations. Let me emphasize that in my mind these five principles should suffuse every program element, no matter how narrow or technical or broad and philosophical, and if an instructor can't or won't work to keep these principles alive for the learner, he or she shouldn't be permitted to continue.
1. Preserve the Wholeness of the Leader-Manager Job …
2. Preserve the Time or Process Quality of the Leader-Manager Job …
3. Preserve Feeling in the Leader-Manager Job …
   the principle of preserving the feeling in the job as we present it to learners is what I think the great theorist Chester Barnard meant when he said that true executive abilities are matters of 'feeling, judgment, sense, proportion, balance, appropriateness.' These qualities go beyond having logical reasons for one's actions. …
4. Preserve Initiative in the Leader-Manager Job …
5. Preserve the Humanism in the Leader-Manager Job. (p 106-112)

Part III -- Learning
6 -- The Learning Challenges of Leadership

The amount and variety of … learning is, in fact, so great that it suggests a new kind of generalization about what managerial leadership is. The prevailing and relatively unexamined assumption of our management schools and our management development programs is that managerial leadership is something that is learned. On the contrary, I think it may make more sense to say that in the present world, managerial leadership is not learned; it is *learning*. That is its essence. (p 121)

** To be immersed in newness is to feel like a beginner. … 'Beginning' is some little-understood compound of self-awareness and situational perception. The learner I am particularly interested in (a managerial leader) is one who realizes, however reluctantly, that the *role* requires learning: it is not a leisurely 'when I get around to it' kind of learning, not an avocation, not a casual encounter. Can we begin to picture what a managerial leader in white water on all sides is actually doing as he or she confronts something never

experienced before? As the managerial leader experiences beginnerhood repeatedly, *perhaps she or he begins to learn how to become a beginner.* (p 122-123)

A direct implication of the interactive nature of empowerment learning is that little if any empowering behavior can be learned 'off-line' in an artificial situation devoid of the followers and other situational factors with which a leader's behavior is going to interact. (This point about the interactive nature of leadership learning is probably true for most of the key behaviors in leadership. This accords with the intuition so many have had that leadership cannot be learned in a classroom.) (p 128)

Steven Rhinesmith … has said, 'there is no way to create significant change unless you are willing to let things get more out of control than you are comfortable with.' (p 129)

7 -- Adult Education as Paradigm Leadership

[no notes]

8 -- Seven Process Frontiers for Organization Development

The definition [of organization development (OD)] is this:
> OD is an organizational process for understanding and improving any and all substantive processes an organization may evolve for performing any tasks and pursuing any objectives. (p 149)

Any declaration of what OD's primary achievements have been is guaranteed to be controversial. But here, anyway, are my candidates. As a generalization, OD has become very competent at helping with any organizational processes that have to do with (1) power sharing or (2) lateral communication, especially when they are occurring around a table in some team or committee meeting. (p 152)

** … it is so hard to explain to a client what a process consultant does; it's easier to say, 'Read this book,' 'Go through this exercise,' 'Watch this videotape,' than it is to say, 'I'm going to charge you cash money for sitting with you and helping you think through how you've been doing, what you want to do next, and how you might go about doing it.' (p 156)

The seven frontiers where new facilitative processes are needed are as follows: …
1. *Top-management development …*
2. *What business are we in? …*
3. *Digesting new technology …*
4. *Integrating new ideas about human resources …*
5. *Sophisticated diagnostic processes …*
6. *Permanent white water strategies …*
7. *The manager as a moral agent …*

Remember that these seven frontiers are *not* OD processes. They are categories within which organizations are trying to do new and different things. (p 158-159)

** In at least four major companies, I have seen the search for young managers of high potential turn into a quasi-scientific testing and assessment program with a quasi-scientifically selected cadre emerging who are then put through a carefully designed series

of experiences designed to capitalize on their presumed high potential. In none of the four situations I have seen was anyone managing the relations of the HiPo's to each other, to others in the organization, or indeed to themselves and their own awareness of who they were as people. (p 163)

Part IV -- Spirit
9 -- The Inherent Spirituality of Organizations

The view of organizations taken in this chapter is the social constructionist view that organizations have no objective characters apart from the system of perceptions of the individuals and groups who comprise them and/or are their stakeholders, including observers. These perceptions can be extraordinarily stable, widely held, and self-reinforcing, thus making it easy to think that they are objective and 'given.' But they are not. Instead, in Weick's phrase, they must be continually reaccomplished. If there is inherent spirituality in organizations, it is to be found in the experiences members and others have in them. (p 172-173)

To say that there is a 'feeling of being organized' is to say that organization members are able to find credibility and meaning in their organizational surroundings. This does not require that they like the policies and processes around them, only that these ongoing organizational events be meaningful for them. (p 174)

** As the stable systems on which we have counted for meaning fall into disarray, high-quality human attitudes and actions become more strategic than ever. Mediocre personal action only works when there is enough wisdom and momentum in the established system to fill in behind the ineffective actions of individuals. (p 176-177)

If we only hold ourselves responsible for *findings*, letting *meanings* go for some other time and some other interpreter, we will not ask the questions that will help us to understand the spiritual needs of today's organizational inhabitants, nor will we be able to learn what there is to be learned form the mystical insights of earlier ages. (p 184)

10 -- Spirituality in the Age of the Leveraged Buyout

I believe that if we can't see how to lead a spiritual life in relation to our typical Western organizations, we are not going to be able to lead a spiritual life at all. There really is not place to hide, to be blunt about it, no extraorganizational place to be more spiritual than seems to be possible in everyday organizations. (p 188)

Part of leading a spiritual life in an organization, I think is to pay attention to and work through the feelings one has about various organizational events …. I say that as one who has tried for years to make the stiff-upper-lip, feelings-don't-matter strategy work and failed. (p 189)

** Fostering transcendent experiences isn't an engineering problem. We do not call forth the best from people, including ourselves, by naked force, by threat, or by subtle manipulation. We do not foster sustainable high-quality thought and action from the

outside by pulling on strings and trying to arrange optimal conditions and incentive structures. (p 195)

How do we describe a human grouping that is managing to provide its members with an intense, positive, memorable experience, an experience that is for each utterly real yet somewhat ineffable, that is for each plain as day yet at bottom somewhat mysterious, that is clearly happening but that cannot be said to be consciously engineered, planned, or managed? First of all I suggest -- and here we move past the material-instrumental model -- that we are observing a *valuing* system. (p 197)

11 -- Executive Development as Spiritual Development

… the question addressed in this chapter: *What are the implications for the spiritual condition and the spiritual growth of individual executives of the need for them to foster vision, vitality, and spirit in the organizations they lead?* Stated not as a question but as a hypothesis, the subject of this chapter is the idea that, to a large extent, *executive development for leadership of modern organizations is spiritual development.* (p 208)

** Millions of training dollars are being spent annually to develop these skills I have named -- intellect, experience, verbal charm, insight into others, and knowledge of strategic management processes -- and they are unquestionably key qualities. But in my judgment, they're not enough. What is still missing are the core values of the person who would do this thing I am calling purposing. What does the person *care* about? What *matters* to the person? What does the person have genuine, spontaneous, unrehearsed, unmodulated, and unhomogenized energy for? What is at the core of the person's *being*? (p 210)

[Describing a session in which a positional leader was participating as an equal, but then abandoned that equality when he saw that the group was about to adopt a position that had no passion …] What impresses me about this situation is how this man's theory about his role, as well as probably some considerable personal shyness and diffidence about expressing strong feelings, almost led him to let his group produce a mission statement that he found boring and inconsistent with his own values and aspirations. …

What I think is going on in such cases is what Carl Rogers called 'incongruence,' and it occurs on a massive scale. Rogers was concerned with the degree of match versus mismatch between three things: a person's total experience of a situation, the parts of it that are allowed into awareness, and what is overtly communicated to other. I think we are possibly in a situation where the real feelings top managers have about themselves, their organizations, and their stakeholders are being systematically suppressed and distorted and ignored in favor of a front called 'executive.' (p 213)

** As hard as it is to be more honest, and as complex as the psychology of the process is, we are in a situation form which there is no turning back. All organizations in Western society, public and private, profit and nonprofit, either are now deep in a process of search for a new mission and purpose or soon will be. And as long as the pace of change continues its chaotic course, the capacity to search and research for basic direction will be the prime element in an organization's survival. It is not an exaggeration to say, therefore, that the deeper springs of leadership energy and commitment are involved in an organization's survival. (p 214-215)

With the phrase *spiritual condition*, I am talking about the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, and the contributions they are making. … [it] refers to the degree to which the person acts on values that transcend the sheer material conditions and events of the world, that is, on values that are not contingent for their validity on these conditions and events. … [it] refers to the extent to which one is experienced by others as concerned with more than superficial and transitory things. (p 218-219)

** Thoughts and feelings are inside; other people and the events they cause are outside. 'Attention' is the meeting of the two, and 'experience' is the cumulative effect through time of paying attention. When inside and outside are meeting and affecting each other freely, effectiveness results. (p 236)

Afterword -- Toward a Pushy Collegiality

The truth is that in our challenging and turbulent organizational world we need the best qualities of both sides, synthesized and integrated in the men and women who are becoming managerial leaders. We need men and women who can think about, write about, teach about, and practice what I have come to call 'pushy collegiality.' This phrase itself joins the two worlds: 'pushy' is colloquial, down-to-earth, focused just on what needs to be done, unpretentious, hands-on. 'Collegial' has a bit more lofty ring, carrying the suggestion that the *way* we work and the *way* we are with each other is as important as, or even more important than, what we get done together. (p 242)