

The soulful leader: success with authenticity, integrity and empathy

Introduction

Resume virtue vs. eulogy virtues

Our society emphasizes achievement, appearance and possessions to the exclusion of developing character, integrity, and service to others. Research studies indicate that one out of every five leaders is toxic; some studies indicate it is closer to three out of every ten. The Workplace Bullying Institute indicates that 65.6 million U.S. workers were affected by bullying. Of those affected 61% left their jobs. 75% of American workers have been affected by bullying either as bystanders or directly. Partly due to this environment many corporate leaders we have treated and consulted with have come to believe they need to make a choice between health, ethics and success. It is a myth that wealth and success must exclude fine character and exceptional interpersonal skills. Love and achievement are not opposites. When we know how to love, how to express compassion and kindness we establish the most powerful foundation for achievement. We go into the work world with a neurochemical balance that makes us more resilient, more creative and more able to negotiate our way through conflict to resolution. A simple human interaction can change our brain chemistry for the better. When we know how to produce calming neurochemicals we automatically reduce stress in our lives while increasing happiness. Happy people, filled with the positive neurochemicals positive relating releases, perform better and more creatively. My goal is to teach personnel and clients to produce these positive brain changes naturally.

The Harvard Business school studies have indicated that EQ is three times more valuable than IQ for success in the business world. Other studies conducted at UC Berkeley found that compassion and empathy decrease as feelings of entitlement and self-absorption increase. Households that earned \$50,000 to \$75,000 gave 7.6% of their income; those who made \$100,000 or more gave 4.2% to charity, in zip codes where more than 40% of people made \$200,000 or more a year, the average rate of giving was a paltry 2.8%. (6 studies on how money affects the mind, 12/20/13, TEDBlog). Brain scans have shown that the wealthy consistently display less empathy; poor people are more attuned to the nuances of relationships out of necessity.

So if empathic leaders are most effective in the corporate world empathy should be correlated with wealth and more importantly empathy has also been proven to be correlated with good health. When we receive and give empathy we produce the near miracle neurochemical oxytocin, which reduces anxiety and the stress hormone cortisol. It also helps us live longer, aids in recovery from illness and injury, promotes a sense of calm and well-being, increases generosity and empathy, protects against heart disease, modulates inflammation, reduces cravings for addictive substances, creates bonding and an increase in trust of others (critical to establishing confidence with clients), decreases fear and creates a feeling of security and makes people open to give and receive love. The wealthy apparently are unaware of the physiological benefits of empathy or they just don't value empathy or know how to develop and express this innate capacity.

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Eulogy virtues

Years ago empathy, compassion, and high-level interpersonal skills were viewed as soft skills not necessary for personal and professional success. If wealth alone made people happy I would be out of business as we encounter wealthy, unhappy, unhealthy individuals daily. In our consultations with corporations we consistently encounter depleted personnel who are excelling financially but have little idea as to what is interfering with experiencing happiness and their ability to sustain intimacy in their marriages, with their children and with friends. We often ask individuals to contemplate what people will say at their funeral and how those comments relate to what is stated in their resumes. Many accomplished, wealthy individuals can describe what they have done in their lives but when it comes describing who they are, and what they have meant to other people the responses typically become more vague. Regardless of our societal emphasis on status and image in the end if we are not comfortable in our own skin, if we have not learned how to gain the respect of others, not just for what we provide but for who we are. we have failed in life. If we fail at love of self and others we fail at life.

Changing the culture to integrative success

Cohen (2008) estimates the timeframe for changing a culture in an organization and "making it stick" to be 3 to 5 years of "relentless efforts". "In order to achieve lasting integration of the change, leaders must model the new behavior themselves, and reward and recognize others who also demonstrate the new behavior" (Cohen, 2008). This requires an ongoing investment of the time of a key member of the executive.

Effective organizational change requires an inside out process. For instance if the financial advisors in a wealth management company are increasing their interpersonal skills along with executives they will feel happier and more confident to establish relationships with a diverse group of clients. Clients will sense this change; our nervous systems talk to each other, we intuitively sense authenticity, which results in trust and faith in an ongoing relationship with a firm when present. FA's will find it easier to create trusting relationships, and with our services they will be able to offer clients and their family's unique opportunities to learn interpersonal skills that will enhance their lives in very significant ways. Clients will be more willing to participate when their advisors believe in the process, inward-outward change.

A study published this year examining the long-term stock performance of companies that had won the Corporate Health Achievement Award, an annual prize that the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine has bestowed since 1996. In each case portfolio of winning companies substantially outperformed the returns of the S&P from 2001 to 2014—often by 200 percentage points or more.

Companies with very healthful cultures accumulated many quantifiable benefits as well. A significant amount of evidence gathered by professor John Quelch of the Harvard Business School suggests that they may have lower healthcare costs overall, less absenteeism, better employee retention, fewer workplace injuries, stronger growth, improved corporate reputations, and greater stock performance.

Lady Geek, a consultant company based in London rates companies across the globe for the degree of empathy present in their corporate culture. There is a clear correlation between empathy and financial success.

Interestingly U.S. banks are capitalizing on the benefits of empathy with their clients, scoring 50% higher than banks in the UK.

Research by the London group indicates that businesses are more productive and profitable when leaders act ethically and interact with staff and clients in considerate ways. The top 10 companies in the most recent Lady Geek Global Empathy Index 2015 increased their value more than twice as those companies rated in the bottom 10. They also generated 50% more earnings. The top 10 companies increased 6% this year, while the bottom 10 companies dropped 9%.

Harvard Review, 11/27/15, Belinda Parmar

The soulful leader

What makes up the soul? Soul is that intangible, invisible part of every human being that yearns for attachment to something deeper and broader than us. A person who is soulful lives with purpose and a desire to be of service. He or she is not primarily motivated by status or image but has a natural interest in teasing out the potential of a family, community, corporation, community and nation. Soulful people lead with great passion, they are intimately aware of the structure of their organization. They are interested in motivating from the bottom up, not from the top down. They know who cleans their office, who mows the lawn, who fixes their computers, who serves the food, who are the secretaries and the receptionists. They speak to everyone, no one person is seen as less valuable in the larger sphere than anyone else. Soulful people tend to lead balanced lives, they work with intensity, they play with intensity, but they know how to turn the dial down and enjoy life. They have an inherent love of young people, they love to educate, to witness the blossoming of young talent, whether it be their own children or the beginners in their businesses. They are the voice of reason in the face of conflict; they are not quick reactors but thoughtful contributors. They know how to listen as they are genuinely interested in understanding not only those like them but also those who on the surface seem different, they are known for finding the common ground.

They take in information from diverse sources. They expect to continue to gain information about themselves, their world and the human condition throughout life. They expect to revise theories and change perspectives as new learning takes place. They are not wedded to one way of thinking, one way of being or one way of leading. They realize and willingly accept that in order to live a healthy, high-

achieving life they must adapt to change, as they will be constantly faced with new situations that require that they adjust and change.

They live their lives with an open heart and an open mind.

Authenticity, wealth and performance

As I mentioned earlier many in the corporate world have come to believe that they have to sacrifice ethics and integrity for wealth and status. However credible research has proven that when we live authentically we create an inner calm that is sensed by others, allowing us to actualize our potential by freeing up energy from the stress of pretending. Leaders who are authentic are attractive to others, they relax those who work for their and their clients as the need to be on guard lessens, freeing people up to make mistakes and participate without the worry of being graded punitively. Authentic leaders cause positive brain changes in themselves and others, creating a high spirited atmosphere that leads to higher production, more creative performance and revenues rise accordingly.

Authenticity relaxes clients as it breeds trust and lessens the idea that FA's have ulterior motives and simply want to make money at their expense. Rather than anticipating a sales process they experience a competent individual who is also humble and willing to listen to the needs and concerns of the clients before him or her.

The inspired actions of a soulful leader

A leader who thinks acts and behaves in a soulful manner inspires others to do the same. Our nervous systems talk to each other, simple human interaction changes brain chemistry, and several empathic interactions change the brain chemistry of an organization. We all remember how the negative of one parent could dominate the feelings of everyone in our homes. A leader has the attention of everyone; he or she is watched closely. As people sense arrogance, dismissal, poor interpersonal skills, lack of compassion, and most importantly lack of integrity the spirit of an organization suffers dramatically. Soulful act from the inside out, they touch a special within that exudes a purity of intention and genuine concern for the mission statement of the business they run.

When I have consulted to corporations I notice as leaders adopt this perspective, not only through understanding but through actions employees follow in suit. Why? Because all human feel better when we relate in compassionate, mindful ways. We change our brains, which makes us happier and more creative. Creativity as a part of successful strategizing increases as behavior becomes more authentic and growth promoting. We become change agents, teasing out the potential of an entire group or organization.

Sustaining soulful leadership

What I am highlighting in this paper is not, as indicated by the research of Cohen, a short-term proposition. I propose that it will only become an integral part of an organization if there are qualified clinical psychologists in-house to provide on-going coaching of the highest caliber to engage corporate members in the process outlined. My goal is to develop an organization of soulful leaders. This could never be attained by periodic workshops or lectures. The change of the soul is an in-depth change, thus a long term strategy is essential for creating a genuine, lasting positive re-organization of the heart that will translate to increased contentment and financial success of the companies that employ these well researched methods.

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Conflicts of interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.