

Article 1: Potent Mix of six

This article is the first of a series which will touch upon the landscape of leadership. This is my passion and it infuses every aspect of my life, my learning and my relationships – how I ‘be’ in the world. I will come at it using the six ‘P’s’ of Potent 6 - using these to illuminate the kind of leadership I am interested in championing. Always I draw on my own lived experience – in the hope that I can shed light on what leadership means to us; how it touches us; and how it plays out in our relationships with ourselves and others.

This exploration starts with a question:

‘How can you lead others if you do not, in fact, lead yourself (in your own life) effectively and purposefully?’

This question is of course loaded with values and assumptions – I make no apologies for that because what I am doing is asking you the very same question I asked myself in 1984. That question challenged me then and continues to inspire me on what is, in truth, a life-long journey ‘how to be the kind of leader I wanted to have’. So this is where I have arrived in 2010....

To me, leadership is personal and it starts with how we **lead** our lives; how we engage with those around us and how we impact on the world. Crucially, it is also to do with what we think about ourselves, others and our lives and what we feel about all this; it is also about what we do or do not do about our feelings.

I believe we are all leaders of our own lives, although some of us may not recognise this or even believe it to be true. Some of us step forward to lead others in various capacities whether that be at work, in our families or in our communities or local groups in which we may be involved. Some people extend their reach and find themselves leading in wider regional, national and international arenas.

People empowered

The path to realising (manifesting) our leadership potential begins at the point at which we realise (recognise) that we have power to ‘choose’ and power to ‘use’. What I love about the word ‘realise’ is that it embraces both a beginning and a culmination. It is in the moment of recognition, that we find the key to our own empowerment; it is when we begin to deploy our power that we make it manifest. What I am interested in, in the context of leadership, is how we then choose to deploy our power in relation to ourselves, others and the world around us? As leaders who have had this revelation, we also have the power to create the context in which those around us can also realise their own power – or we can find ways to limit or sabotage this process. If we believe that power is finite and that it can be given and taken away – then we may find ourselves doing what we can to hold on to ours, for fear that if another becomes more powerful, then we will become weaker and somehow diminished. Until we understand the paradox - that to become more powerful, we must claim and pool our power – we will keep finding ourselves working in opposition, competing, manipulating and wasting our power on distracting tactics and self-protective strategies, rather than focusing energy and attention on more worthy intentions.

Purpose (discovered) accomplished

The six ‘Ps’ of Potent 6 represent a compelling upward spiral that culminates in ‘Purpose accomplished’. Purpose is about intention – it is something to which we commit or dedicate ourselves. When our Purpose is clear and strong and about something far bigger than ourselves, it can provide us with life-long meaning.

Purpose reveals itself to us when we start paying attention to what ‘energises’ us. Once fully revealed, it can then become what I call our ‘inner guiding light’. It keeps us going and illuminates each step we take, even when we walk through dark times; even when we cannot formulate a vision of the future we want to create. Nietzsche (quoted by Viktor Frankl) suggested that a person with meaning (purpose) can endure any hardship. So Purpose (intention) is not really an end-state. It

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can be as big as being our reason for living; it is what gets us moving and keeps us moving in a unshakeable, sustained and sustainable way. It becomes a part of who we are and how we are in the world. In its essence, it embraces values and these play out in our behaviours and actions. Once it claims us, it can be with us for the rest of our lives.

As a practicing Nichiren Buddhist, my Purpose is about unity, peace, collaboration; and my own human revolution (personal transformation). My unique part in all this involves bringing my talents to illuminate the inner, interpersonal and wider systemic processes at play that impede our co-creative abilities. In a single sentence my Purpose is:

'Inspiring leaders to co-create a world in which all can forever flourish'

I love bringing light into the shadows so that we can see what is going on for us. I love helping others to realise that mostly what has been hiding in the shadows, is fear generated by our imagination and not grounded in reality. I love helping others discover what brings meaning to their lives. I love helping them to develop mastery over their unconscious minds so they can use their power fully and consciously to serve their chosen cause.

When we are able to see what we do well and speak about what we love doing, we are on to something important for us as individuals.

Passion ignited

When our 'claimed' Purpose truly resonates with us, something within, ignites. It is as if our Purpose brings with it a life-force. It is our passion ignited and we know it because we become energised, enthused, inspired. Passion of this nature brings to us an energy that sustains us through hard, challenging times. You will know if you have truly accessed this kind of passion because, it feels very different to another emotion that we often use with it - desire.

In my article last month, I illustrated the benefits of being conscious - being aware of the inner activity and conversations we have in our minds. What we think affects how we feel. If we believe ourselves to be powerless, stupid, weak then we precipitate feelings that are unlikely to help us go forward in our lives – anxiety, fear, frustration, despair, apathy – such emotions can slow us down, hold us back, bring us to a halt. In this scenario, our minds are not serving us well.

At other times, we can find ourselves experiencing strong emotions that create great energy and action. This can be desire (sometimes obsessive) for something or someone; or it can be a powerful fear; in each case, we become activated to move forcefully towards or away from whatever or whoever it is. This energy is a kind of drivenness that can find us 'out of control'. Something unconscious has a grip of us and so we may 'find' ourselves on a path of incessant activity followed by 'crashing' to a halt because of illness or exhaustion. Yes - we might escape a seemingly dreadful situation or even achieve a great many things – become very rich, famous, have big houses, fast cars, designer handbag and shoes..... but somehow none of this seems to satiate us or bring us peace, contentment, fulfillment, meaning. If you've ever watched the 'Secret Millionaire' you will have a sense of what I am talking about here.

In both 'driven' scenarios, our unconscious mind is controlling us – we are servants to its call; trapped by the way in which we perceive the situation. You can tell by your language when you are caught because you will hear yourself saying things like 'I can't; I have to; I ought to; I should; I must; I really, really want that/ don't want that'. Our language is like a beacon to what is going on inside our heads and once we begin to notice what we are saying, we can then begin to transform our conversations - first on the inside and then on the outside as we relate to others. As we gain mastery over our mind, our emotions and then our language and actions, we truly begin to take charge of our power.

Power synthesised

This is when we can begin to bring our power together with that of other's, making it work for a bigger Purpose, a greater Vision. Humans are relational beings. We create more when we are in

tune with each other; and yet it takes work and a willingness to overcome challenges that frequently find us keeping our distance and trying to go it alone. Learning to play with and share power helps us recognise the benefits of uniting together. If we do this from a grounded, purposeful and aware place, we increase our chances of actually being able to create effectively with others. Synthesis and synergy become possible.

Partners united

Recognising both the benefits of sharing our power and the cost of not sharing, helps to bring us to a place of readiness to unite. We begin to see that we cannot actually achieve very much on our own – we come to understand that whilst our power is generally far more than we dare imagine, it is also never as potent as the collective power of partners acting in concert.

Performance enhanced

By focusing attention on creating, aligning and strengthening the previous building blocks, we grow confidence, trust and momentum. Adding this together with a commitment to gathering and giving effective feedback and paying attention to what is working and what needs adjusting, the additional benefits of enhanced performance within the whole system become more and more likely.

Like any spiral process – if you get the first stage wrong it starts heading downwards; get it right it builds upwards. The 6 ‘Ps’ are no different. Do your own inner work to enable you to lead consciously and purposefully; seek to awaken the potential in others and then all the rest will follow – after all, it is people who make things happen and when we do right by them, they bring their best to their endeavours.

If your people aren’t performing well then look to yourself first – what goes on inside us is reflected outside. As a leader, it is you who creates the conditions for growth and decline. So if you want the outside to change, the best way is to undertake your own internal human revolution – your own personal transformation.

Looking ahead

In future articles, I intend to touch more deeply on some of the issues raised previously. I will also share more about my understanding and experience of what it takes to be an Inspiring Leader.

In the mean time, if you would like to find out more, or would like a conversation about how I might be able to support you, do get in touch. I’d love to hear from you.

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