

Completing the Weave:

Engaging the Heart and Enriching the Spirit



TRANSEARCH
EXECUTIVE SEARCH & LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

John O. Burdett





Completing the Weave: Engaging the Heart and Enriching the Spirit

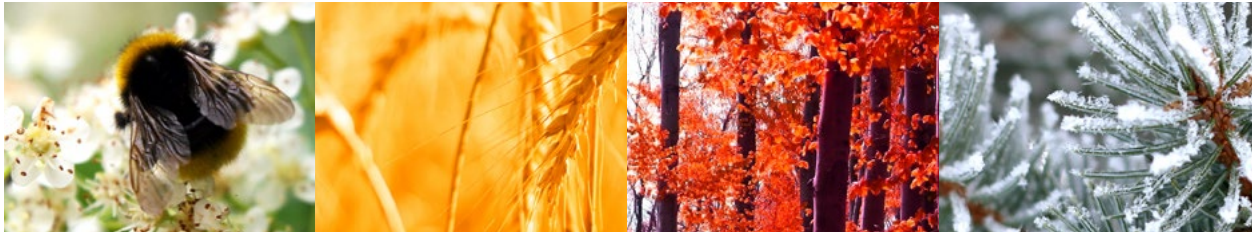
John O. Burdett

“Spirit in the warrior is made whole by the balance between the fierceness necessary to draw the bow and the gentleness demanded at the release of the arrow.”

The four seasons – winter, spring, summer and autumn – define nature’s rich and unfolding pattern. Each has its own role, meaning, value, and delight. Winter is a time of renewal. A period of planning and investment where “the head” is given full provenance. Spring is for preparation – tilling the land and sowing seeds. Its latent promise emerges violently from hidden depths. The power of “the hand.” Summer is a season of abundance, of richness, of gathering in the crops. Summer is of “the heart.” Autumn, through its muted colours, reminds us that change is ever-present. It’s a celebration of life. A time to give thanks and gather the seeds for next year’s crop. “The spirit.” The four seasons are a constant reminder of nature’s intricate weave, an unfolding ecology where failure in one season means failure overall.

The allegory is of the seasons, but nature’s weave prompts invaluable insights into that essential human quality we call “leadership.” In doing so it captures unfulfilled promise. Unfulfilled because, despite ongoing investment in coaching, a cornucopia of management books, training sessions, various assessments, web-based tutorials and the like, lack of leadership still represents the major malady affecting today’s organizational success.

The evidence? Change initiatives still fall short of expectations. The majority of mergers and acquisitions do not deliver on that which is promised. AI offers great promise but not, as often is the case, where the intent is to embed AI into a 20th century organization. The recruitment lag for the right individual to steer a troubled organization through heavy seas



is often many months. There is a veritable army of talent available but the vast majority cut their teeth in a very different time. The erosion of loyalty, executive burnout, an inability to fully embrace the opportunity hybrid employment represents,¹ cultural myopia,² a short-term, win-lose mentality, and a significant rise in mental health issues at work – they all blow the weathervane in the direction of a leadership malaise. And if the role is global, the prevailing wind is likely to be gale force.

There is a Yearning in the Land

There are, of course, success stories. Our leaders have been well trained in strategic planning – significantly less so in strategic doing. By the legion they can measure, analyse, refine, budget, and work the numbers such that financial engineering has come to contain an elegant beauty all its own. The marketplace has been segmented, and segmented, and will, no doubt, be segmented many times more. The emerging channels of distribution would be alien to someone who retired even five years ago. And those who preach the need to have a winning value proposition have made their business development adherents celebrities. Winter is all that could be asked of it. Leadership, as defined by **the head** (*cognitive intelligence*), is alive and thriving, as, indeed, it must be. AI will make this even more the case.

The story doesn't end there. Spring is in full bloom. Leveraging the power of technology, robotics, improved end-to-end value chains, the ability to run international projects around the world 24 hours a day, improved cycle times, vastly expanded data storage, capturing knowledge, brand awareness, project management, sustainability (at least, superficially), hiring that recognises the worth of diversity, benchmarking against the best, smart systems, breakthrough materials – they all capture value creation. Leadership, as represented by **the hand** (*practical/kinetic intelligence*),³ is a gardener's delight – as, indeed, it has to be.

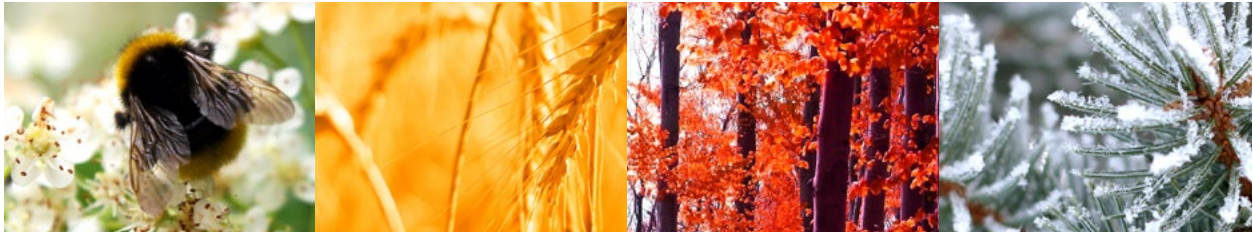
What issues such as “quiet quitting” tell us, however, is that there is a yearning in the land⁴ – a cry for something beyond that being offered. Indeed, it is more than a cry, it is a chorus, one that has reached a crescendo where the common voice sings out, “This does not meet

1 With the redundancy of so-called “management by walking around,” new and creative ways to connect, coordinate, and collaborate have yet to emerge.

2 Very few organizations have a truly effective measure of the culture they have – and the culture they need. The latter being the more important! If the measure you are using looks and sounds like it belongs in the second year of a psychology class, it belongs in the second year of a psychology class. And if your “measure” is limited to the ubiquitous engagement survey, you are addressing no more than 16% of the factors that describe organizational culture.

3 Kinetic intelligence is a concept first developed by Howard Gardner.

4 In Gallup's 2023 report, “State of the Global Workplace,” the underlying analysis indicates that fully 50% of the world's employees are quiet quitting. The potential impact on the customer is without precedent.

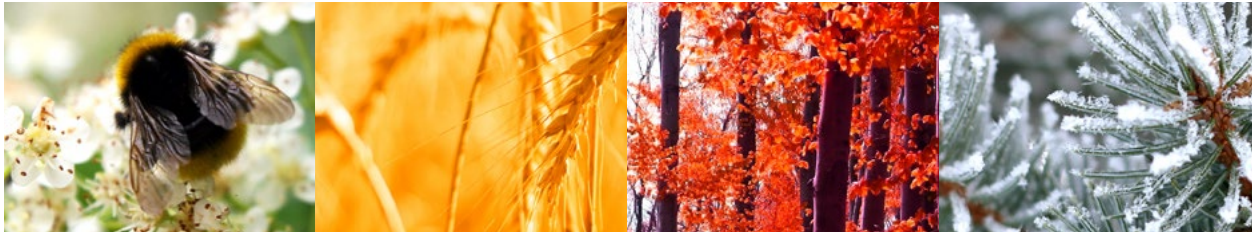


my needs!”⁵ We are describing a level of discontent that is both deep-rooted and a harbinger of an irreversible shift in power from the enterprise to the employee.⁶ Paradoxically, each year we invest billions of dollars in leadership development.⁷ What is often lost is that leadership is far more than a comprehensive plan, putting the resources in place and a focus on short-term results. Leadership is a noble calling. It’s enriching people’s lives while, at the same time, leaving a legacy. It’s a privilege – a sacred trust that has to be earned every single day.

Nature’s plan lies not within any single season but in its unfolding unity. Each season may be special, but it is the whole that yields nature’s purpose. So it is with leadership. Leadership that defines the direction is of the head (winter). Leadership that frames delivery is of the hand (spring). Leadership that seeks to build business growth through learning and development must touch people’s hearts (summer).⁸ And, in completing the weave, leadership that enriches day-to-day dialogue encompasses the spirit (autumn). See **Figure One**.



5 Be it the US, Germany, France or the UK only one in four employees feel strongly that the organization cares about their wellbeing. Gallup, *Future Shock*, 2023.
 6 Forget one size fits all. Welcome to an era of omni-employment where work, especially for those you need most, has to fit people’s lifestyle needs.
 7 According to Research.com, Leadership Development is a \$360-billion global annual investment.
 8 As a pragmatic reality, you can’t grow the business without growing the people in the business.



Only when all of the seasons are “full,” only when each unfolds fully one unto another does leadership truly flourish. Only when the weave is complete can servant leadership – the leader works for the team – be fully realised. Only when leadership fully embodies cognitive, practical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence can leadership be the difference that makes a difference.

To the four dimensions of intelligence outlined we must add a fifth: ecological intelligence.⁹ Here we are describing a way to think **and act** that fully recognises the footprint we leave on the planet. A societal imperative our indigenous cousins have retained but that, since the birth of the Industrial Revolution, “civilised cultures” have foolishly chosen to set aside. In that a lack of ecological intelligence now amounts to an existential threat, we are describing a “must have” intelligence that must be wholly present in each of the seasons.

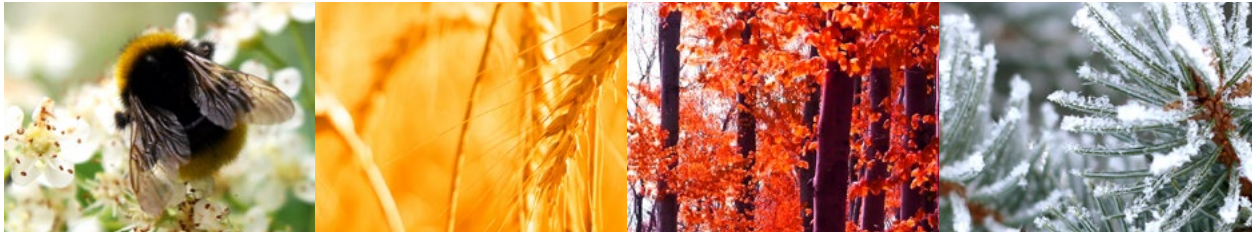
Decades of business school training, a historical focus on short-term shareholder value, and the “productivity motive” that underscores the rationale for new technology have resulted in head and hand mastery. Dealing with ever-increasing complexity and unparalleled uncertainty means that to be a successful leader is to do far more. Successful leaders complete the weave. They engage **the heart** and enrich **the spirit**.

Engaging the Heart

The head defines *direction*. The hand frames *delivery*. The heart is engaged when leaders know, really know, how to orchestrate inclusion. Work that demands stretch, responsibility that empowers, customers who are delighted, openness of communication, collaboration, pushing decision-making into the organization, and, with it, a sense of ownership – all transform apathy into appetite and turn a dictate to go along into a desire to excel. Learning, growth, and development enrich the heart. To appeal to the heart is to both inspire and build commitment.

Organizations spawned over the past 200 years have been the product of two far-reaching assumptions. The first: without extensive rules, policies, and procedures, people will act irresponsibly. The second: the best way to organize an enterprise is to create simple jobs linked together by complex processes. The first destroys trust. The second robs those involved of any feelings of personal worth. To touch people’s hearts is to reach into every far corner and purge the enterprise of these beliefs. Leaders who engage the heart create

⁹ When we add ecological intelligence to interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence we are fully describing “emotional intelligence.” An invaluable concept, its shortfall being that an overemphasis on emotional intelligence can mean that the value of cognitive and practical/kinetic intelligence is understated.



enriching work and build from the premise that, given the opportunity, people will get it right. The research? Diverse and inclusive¹⁰ organizations are likely to outperform their competitors by 35% and 70% more likely to win new business.¹¹

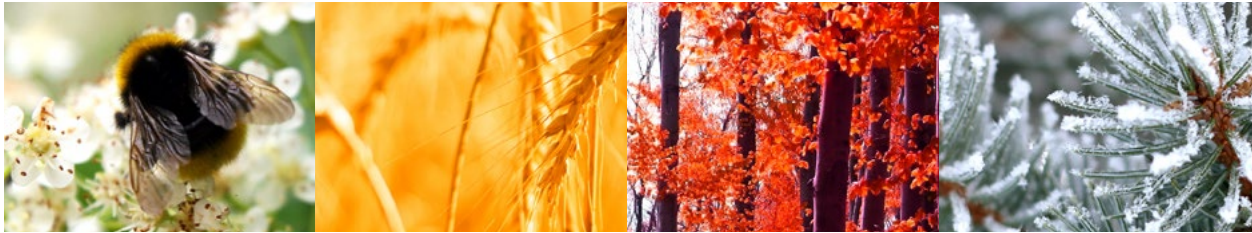
Language and imagery touch the heart. A lame, “me too,” one-dimensional picture of tomorrow is a mandate for mediocrity. A vision that fails to present a vivid, vibrant, compelling future is a signal that the organization is destined to be forever becalmed. Metaphors and symbols that exalt the kill but omit the warrior’s reverence for the prey, define a “hunt” devoid of honour. Language that excludes, that limits, that restricts, that belittles, that signals elitism, that is about ego sucks the energy out of the business. Language that dwells unnecessarily on yesterday, that reinforces hierarchical power, that projects “boss-ship,” that puts down the customer, that seeks to control – creates a toxic environment and, at the first sign of difficulty, despair.

Leaders accordingly understand that language isn’t merely important, they act with the knowledge that language is everything. Same old language, same old behaviour! Language that is rooted in humility, that is dominated by caring engages the heart. Language that sings of the possible, that challenges, that celebrates, that shares, that affirms, that encourages, that is woven into a positive story, that accesses the right humour, that is self-deprecating lies at the very heart of a culture marked by resilience and regeneration.



¹⁰ It may be better to think of this as “inclusion and diversity.” Working to build a diverse workforce without first creating a culture of inclusion results in frustration and disillusionment.

¹¹ *People magazine* (January 2024).



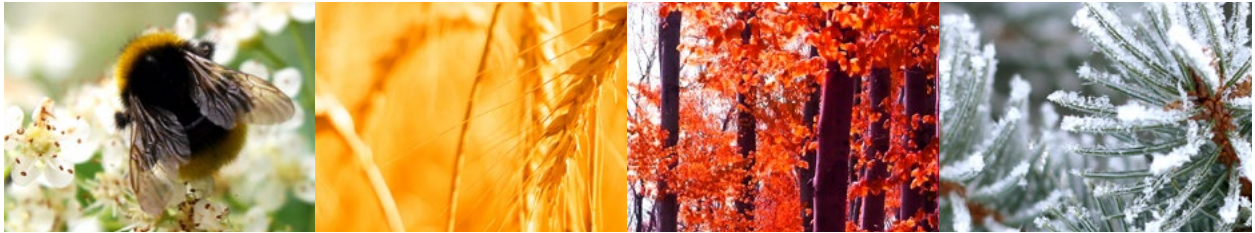
We see new possibility through metaphor and learn through story. The right story changes the listener's brain chemistry. In secreting oxytocin¹² the listener becomes empathetic to the idea being presented. A negative story can inform but only a positive story inspires. Leaders are exceptional storytellers. Great leaders are great storytellers. Little is more powerful – be it in business development, in response to a question at a townhall meeting, or in seeking to persuade a great candidate to join the team – than a sentence that starts with, “Let me share a story.”

A prevailing thought in the mind of western culture is that much that ails us can be overcome if only we would spend more time working on relationships. Leadership, selling, love, marriage, personal growth, mentoring, self-doubt, so the mantra goes, all can be “fixed” if relationship skills are brought to the fore. The vast majority of such entreaties are an empty vessel destined only to provide more noise and take up valuable emotional space in our lives. The capacity to build and thrive in intimacy is not a technique, or a pre-ordained set of skills but a product and outcome of what we really care about. “Why” always precedes “how.” Or as Teddy Roosevelt put it, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Showing that you care, gives fractured relationships traction; it introduces the transformative *raison d’être*.

The presumption that new behaviours can emerge from entrenched ways is to admit defeat before the clash of battle is enjoined. Champions are nourished not by what worked yesterday but by the opportunity to move into new spaces. The change of cadence and rhythm that accompanies new patterns of play engages the heart. Championships are won by the unexpected, by the bold act the opposition had not planned for, by a finely honed sense of the “moment.” Leaders who make a difference constantly change their own patterns of play. New patterns create new opportunity. Retaliate first. The best strategy is to ask what is the most damaging thing the competition can do... and do it first.

There are four ways to “know.” There is the knowing of the head – the awareness that comes from analysis, study, and measurement. There is the knowing of the hand – derived from practice and through skilled observation. There is knowing from the heart – an intuitive sense of what feels right. And there is the knowing rooted in the spirit – a deep inner awareness that connects self, time, and purpose. Knowing from the head and the hand translates data into information. Knowing from the heart and spirit transforms information into insight that, when complemented by rich experience, instils “wisdom.”

¹² Oxytocin is a hormone that’s produced in the hypothalamus and released into the bloodstream by the pituitary gland. In new mothers it is sometimes called “the love drug.”



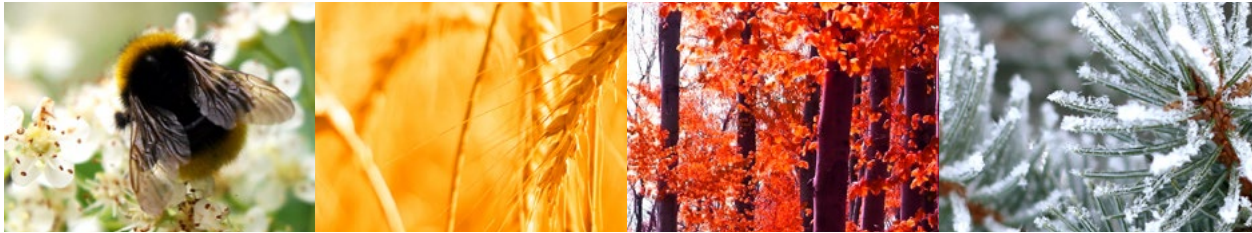
Today is the fastest things have ever been but the slowest they will ever be. Leaders who make critical decisions skewed heavily to the head and hand are ignoring the reality that much of what they are measuring and even observing is either out of date or redundant. In a world where speed of response, organizational agility, and an ability to manage uncertainty rule, leaders destined to thrive are those who, when the situation demands it, complement analysis/measurement with an ability to tap into an inner wisdom – a deep-rooted sense of “the way forward” that is accessed by hearing the heart and allowing the spirit to speak. Steve Jobs transformed the world as we knew it by doing exactly that. No number of focus groups – which he distained – could have come up with the iPhone.

Leadership isn’t just a science – for the very best leaders it is also an art. Hiring top talent is an example. With the right tools (not common), defining the essential characteristics of fit¹³ is relatively straightforward. Mastery is also to create visual scenarios, real-time mental imagery that by “being there” projects the candidate’s potential to interface with key stakeholders in the hiring organization.¹⁴ Override hiring as an art and expect to engage an



13 Fit = assessing the emerging culture, building an operational and strategic scorecard, establishing forward looking leadership competencies, and defining “tomorrow’s team.” These, of course, need to be complemented by a winning hiring value proposition and a truly impactful integration process.

14 This is not meant to imply that concerns about a potential “misfit” automatically disqualify the candidate. To do so would be to suggest that bias, discrimination, and cultural differences are a thing of the past. Insight as to potential concerns, however, can ease the successful candidate’s path (integration) into the new role.



unwelcome number of “empty suits.” And remember, in a corporate version of *Groundhog Day*¹⁵ you are going to meet your new hire every day... every day... every day. The single most underestimated word in the leadership lexicon? “Imagine.”

Values touch people’s hearts. Here we encounter “organizational values” – invariably generated with the naive assumption that organizations can create such values, without factoring in the drive, desires, and determination of those who make up the informal organization (culture), without recognising that the only day in the year that the formal organization has primacy is on the 29th February.

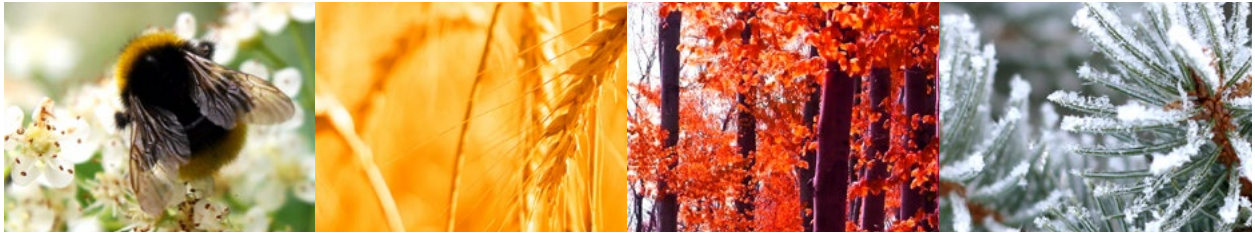
Organizational values should touch people’s hearts – often they don’t. Few front-line employees get up with the lark, have a sparkle in their eye and a spring in their step, all inspired by the thought of getting to work early to embrace the organization’s values. The problem? Organizational values are, all-too-often, derived from the head and the hand. They seek to solve past problems rather than be a source of inspiration. To exacerbate that dilemma, values are rarely expressed in outcome terms.¹⁶ Leaders who make a difference recognise that organizational values that don’t engage the heart, that are misaligned with the ethos of the informal organization, and that fail to engage different generational cohorts quickly become little more than untidy window dressing on the organization’s website.

An insightful question to ask a successful leader is, “Who or what was it that made the difference in your life?” The answer invariably points to an individual who listened, who inspired, who gave them the strength to follow their passion, who encouraged them to soar: a teacher, a mentor, a coach. To share of one’s self is to engage the heart. To share one’s story and to guide a colleague, peer, or subordinate through and past the waiting organizational pitfalls is to engage the heart. To provide the context, the challenge, the opportunity, and to give timely feedback – with the result that a subordinate and/or team member embraces their full potential – is to engage the heart. Leaders who make a difference **always** make the time to teach, mentor, and coach. If you can’t coach – you can’t lead!

There is no magic, no secret elixir, and no hidden formula to hiring and keeping talent. People are drawn to organizations where they feel a sense of belonging, when they are connected to the organization’s purpose, where they can grow and make a difference. People elect to stay when they feel that they are being listened to, are informed as to what is going on, know themselves to be successful, and believe that, regardless of what happens to the business, they have currency in the job market. If there is a common thread that links these attributes, it is learning. Leaders who retain top talent invariably have a passion to learn.

¹⁵ *Groundhog Day* is a 1993 movie where the protagonist is caught in a time warp where every day repeats exactly the events of the previous day.

¹⁶ Overtures to simply be “innovative” don’t meet the test of a meaningful organizational value. “To introduce a new product into the market every eighteen months” does.

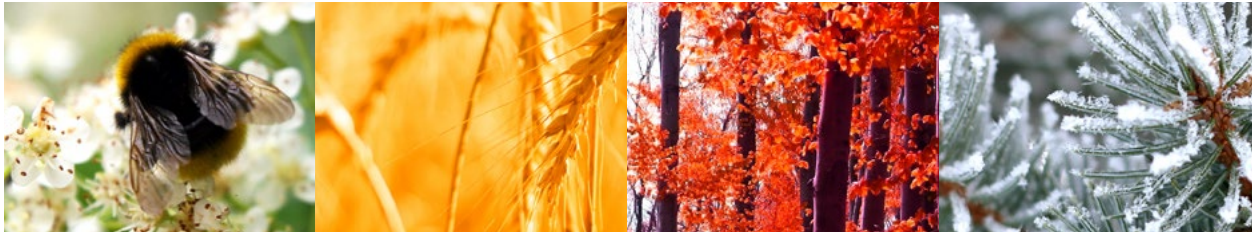


It's an irreplaceable asset that focuses, fuels, and formulates the quality of the ongoing conversation. Put succinctly, leaders are readers. Leaders who don't read are no better off than those that can't read. In an ever-more unpredictable world, the key to success is **READ**iness.

Learning is of the heart. New ways to be necessitate new ways to learn. A world being continuously transformed means that those who stand in the eye of the storm must be capable of navigating even when the wind, rain, and lightning crash together with full force. Invaluable as training and instruction are, they are invariably not the means whereby people see their work anew. For that to happen, traditional forms of learning (simple learning) must, as appropriate, give way to learning how to learn. This, in turn, means elegantly crafting the learning to fit the context. Two routes, in particular, lay open. The first, studying and learning from emerging market leaders. What is it that they do that is separating them from the rest?¹⁷ If you want to be the best, you have to learn from the best! The second, where the learner's boundaries have a degree of stretch and where experimentation, pushing the boundaries, and risk define the status quo. Regardless as to the form taken, learning without reflection is like trying to make an omelette without eggs.



¹⁷ For a professional services firm, for example, this represents both a dilemma and an opportunity. A dilemma because it's often easier to develop business with second-rung clients. Conversely, opportunity lies in learning derived from working with truly best-in-class clients. The problem? Taking the easy option results in a "learning deficit" that may well, in the course of time, be difficult to recover from.



Beyond *learning how to learn* lies *learning how to learn limited only by the learner's imagination* – a process best described as “self-discovery.” Ideally, given access to appropriate resources, the employee designs and shapes the nature of their own learning. Meanwhile, we don't learn from getting it wrong. That merely indicates what not to do. We learn, we excel, we move down a new track when we recognise and build on getting it right. Leadership that engages the heart recognises and acts on the belief that, in many respects, how people learn is more important than what they learn.

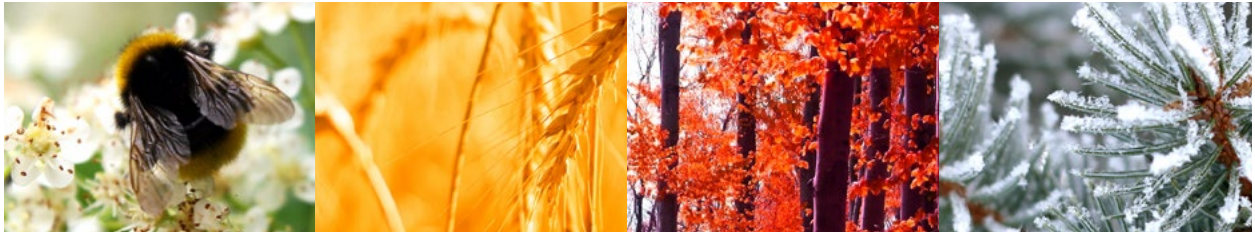
Leaders who touch people's hearts seek out and reinforce excellence and, in doing so, eschew, what for many managers, is accepted practice: *managing by exception*.¹⁸ Engaging the heart means “catching people doing it right” and not sitting back waiting until missed targets set the tone for the relationship. To lead is thus to celebrate success – not at some time in the future but in the *moment*.

Engaging the heart means exploring new ways to approach old problems. This implies several underpinning leadership actions.

- Regularly revisiting the business model. The business model, in turn, captures what tomorrow's customer wants to buy and how they want to buy it – especially, how they want to buy it. If you are following a faulty compass, don't expect to arrive at the destination you planned for!
- Ensuring that “the customer” is always at the table.¹⁹ A conversation about the future that ignores the customer's emerging expectations is an exercise in self-delusion.
- Being the last to speak when a new topic comes up in a meeting. Nothing extinguishes the early spark of innovation quicker than the leader who seeks to impose their ideas on the team.
- Understanding that the answers voiced are an outcome of the quality of the questions asked. A great question changes the conversation the listener is having with themselves.
- Listening in a way that you, the leader, have always wanted to be listened to. You will know when you are really listening. The silence in the room grows louder.
- Recognising that challenging mental models trump any assumption that there is a “right” way. If you assume for even a moment that what got you here will get you to where you need to be, you are on the wrong track.

¹⁸ Management by exception is acting only where a critical goal has been missed or is off track.

¹⁹ The first rule of a successful and vibrant culture is to manage the business from the outside-in.



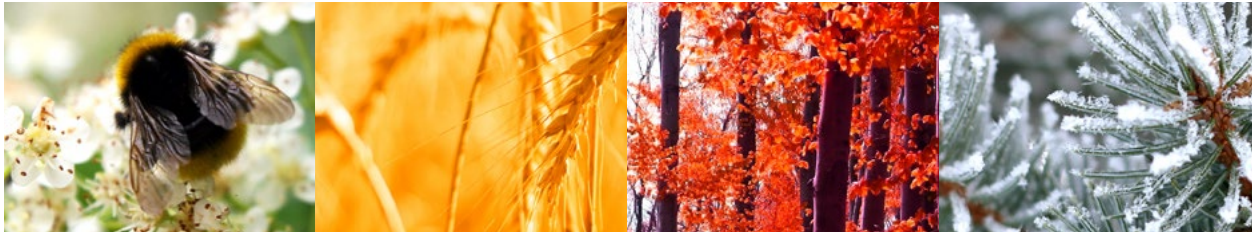
- Being comfortable saying “I don’t know” or “I got it wrong.” The leader who displays comfort with being uncomfortable, promotes a climate of psychological safety.
- Without psychological safety, “candour” quickly becomes “can’t do.”
- Being prepared to ask “dumb” questions and/or being willing, on occasions, to embarrass oneself. In doing so the leader embraces and celebrates their own vulnerability. Opening oneself up to be vulnerable is step one in developing resilience.

The heart is represented by summer. Summer is a time to harvest. It’s when questions posed during the winter and amplified during the spring are answered. It’s when nature moves to bring the planning of winter and planting of the spring into full fruition. It is a time of endorsement, engagement, and enlightenment. Summer is when the leader champions, nurtures, and takes pride in growth. It’s when character matters. We develop character in others through example. Talent is a gift; character is a choice.

Enriching the Spirit

Spirit touches the deepest part of who we are. When we talk of spirit, we are giving voice to that which is the very essence of who we are. Spirit is more than an abstract description of behaviour, more than a deep-rooted personal orientation, more than a hidden song of the possible; spirit is an enriching attribute that comes to life in the *day-to-day dialogue*.





Change the conversation and you change what's possible. If your sales overtures are falling on stony ground, change the conversation.

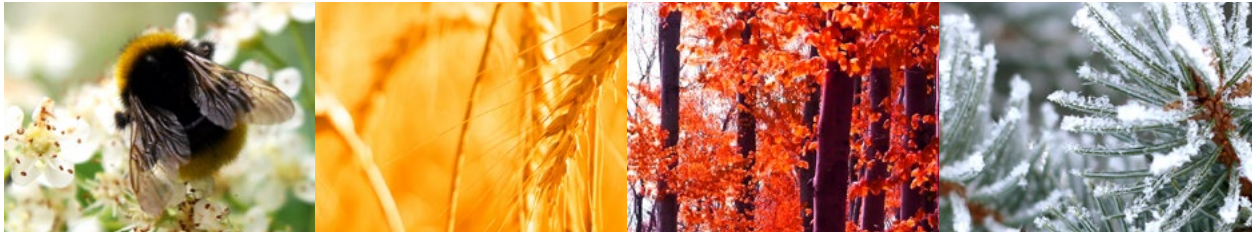
Dialogue is of the spirit. Dialogue is a conversation where judgement is put on hold; assumptions of outcome, power, and status are parked; and where probing inquiry and time set aside for reflection are deemed a necessary prerequisite for new levels of understanding to emerge. Dialogue is the container whereby people buy-in to the *why*.

Discussion and dialogue are not the same. One is the skill, knowledge, and judgement of the plumber who knows that when a channel is blocked little can flow. The other is the art of the conductor who understands how and when to bring in different instruments such that the final outcome is a rich sense of harmony. Discussion seeks to solve a problem. Dialogue is about opening new frontiers. Both are essential.

Spirit is sparked by actions that encompass outcomes beyond personal gain. For the individual, it equates to success of the team. For the team, it means that the organization benefits. For the organization, any meaningful definition of success must include the wider community. Leaders who win people's commitment build their agenda around a purpose that embodies within it a deep sense of meaning. Good is the enemy of the great. Without a compelling purpose, "good" becomes "good enough." A leader with spirit doesn't just love what they do, they love why they do it. A leader without spirit is akin to a plough horse with a damaged leg.

For the leader, spirit is anchored in a passionate desire to serve. Here we face a dilemma. For those brought up with English as a first language, "to serve" conjures up the sounds and pictures of *servitude*. Indeed, the British class system relegates those who serve to one of the lower rungs on the ladder of social importance. In the US, "the leader as the lone hero" has historically equated success with power, domination, and tough mindedness. The language and imagery in other cultures is less restricting. In Finland, for example, to serve is captured by the word *hinku*. *Hinku* recognises not just the value of serving but the enriching nature, dignity, and personal growth that the act of serving embodies. Sustainable leadership, leadership that enriches the spirit, leadership that builds loyalty, leadership that transforms stem from an all-encompassing feeling of *hinku*.

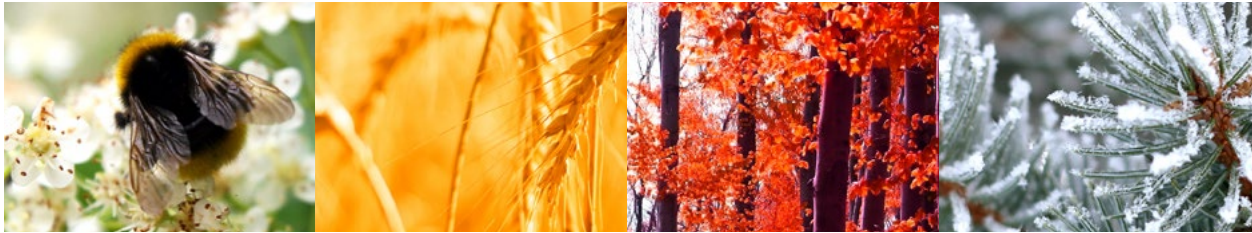
"Courtesy" comes from the Old French word "curteis." In exquisite detail it defined the correct behaviour at Court. During Louis XIV's rule, courtly conduct filled several large books. The late Peter Drucker referred to courtesy as "the lubricant of leadership." In the modern world, courtesy refers to social conduct that builds rapport. Rapport, in turn, opens the door to trust. Gift giving on being greeted in Japan, the ritual when being passed a business card in India, the need to keep both hands above the table when dining socially in



South America, and the best business development behavioural ballet – all reflect courtesy. The intriguing thing about courtesy is that you can know the rules, you can practice how to act but genuine courtesy, like respect, has to be authentic. As with a painted-on smile, courtesy that doesn't emanate from a serving spirit puts a dent in the potential to build rapport. Lack of courtesy, of course, severely limits what is possible. Courtesy is no small thing. In that you will not have a second chance to make a first impression, don't leave home without it!

To recognise one's spirit is to know that loneliness and solitude are not the same thing. The former describes a separation, an unnatural state where an individual is like a flower or plant without water – starved of something vital to its growth and ultimate survival. Solitude, on the other hand, is time set aside to reflect and to deepen our understanding of where we are on our life's mission. Solitude is a natural, empowering, and, arguably, essential dimension of knowing who we are. Solitude is a present we give ourselves when the forces that impact our lives are misaligned. Leaders who excel are deeply committed to the journey embarked on and are acutely conscious of a need to know and like themselves. They also fully recognise that if you are not living your own story, you are living someone else's.





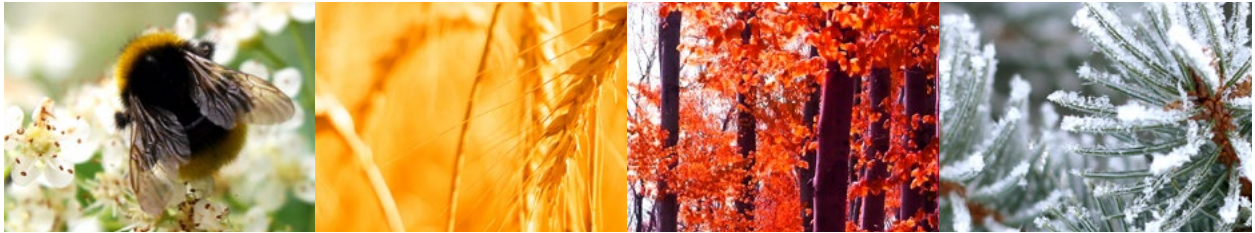
There are two central measures of team success: (i) today's performance; and (ii) the extent to which the team is equipped to surf the waves of tomorrow's uncertainty.²⁰ Complacency with regards to either corrodes competitiveness. Meanwhile, there are few certainties in business. One assured reality is that tomorrow's organization will, of necessity, be a team of teams. Count on it.

Few have had the joy of being a part of a truly great team. A great team transcends the ordinary, rejects mediocrity, and eschews success based on past performance. They recognise the individual while building a culture based on success of the whole team. There are no weak members, only those who sing in a different key. They see the impossible as merely another challenge and the extraordinary as a base camp for the next push up the mountain. When things go wrong a great team changes gears and puts their foot to the floor. They come to win and not to avoid defeat. They don't have *failure* or *hoped for success* in their dictionary. Super teams transcend the impact of even the most highly lauded superstar. Great teams win. Great leaders build great teams. Here it should be added, the only thing more problematic than a dysfunctional team is a great team going in the wrong direction.

The glue that bonds and connects those in a great team is an overarching sense of purpose nurtured not by edict ("follow me") but by leadership (shape the context). It is an inner drive drawn out of a challenge that would sound discordant to an ordinary team. It is a shared behaviour fuelled by mutual respect, trust, and disdain for the status quo. It is a common mentality that hugs opportunity and relishes risk. It is a way to act that celebrates the duality of both belonging and reaching out to include others. Team spirit both surfaces and shares best practice while, at the same time, revelling in the joy born out of the success of those on the team who overcome adversity. Spirit is an unbreakable bond apparent not only in the way success is celebrated but in the generosity extended to those who stand on the podium in second place. Leaders who draw others to them display generosity of spirit. Today, more than ever!

The challenge? Teamwork cannot be taught; it can only be lived. If people don't have an opportunity to "touch" their personal best they remain ignorant of what they are truly capable of. Spirit remains a vague and ephemeral concept until the team moves to the very edge of their comfort zone. A great team thrives in the creative tension evoked by being fully stretched, by helping others on the team up their game. Leaders who make a difference understand that successful teamwork is more like flamenco than a waltz. A team that goes where others can only dream of embarks on a holistic, full-bodied experience that personifies spirit the way that the flamenco dancer loses themselves to the dance (*duende*).

²⁰ I regularly hear leaders say that they have "a great team." The dilemma? "How do they know?" Without actually measuring team effectiveness, without fully considering future capability, any such statement should be interpreted as a leading indicator of "creeping complacency."

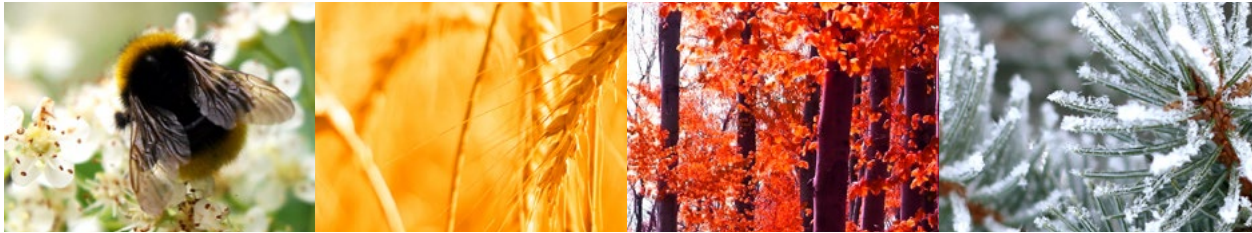


Love and caring are of the heart. Courage is illustrative of the spirit. Courage is to act with boldness when others hold back. It is to say “no” when political expediency suggests otherwise. It is to reject the accepted way to be. It is to quickly stand when adversity, self-doubt, and uncertainty cause one to stumble. It is to challenge leadership that fails to be true to the values being espoused. It is to step aside and allow others more qualified to make the decision.

Courage is to deliberately listen even more intensely when the answer seems obvious. It is to let go of behaviour that no longer fits the current reality. It is to know that “unless I change, nothing changes.” It is to look into one’s own sense of purpose. It is to think deeply about issues that others face only in times of crisis.

Courage is to ask, “Does the work I am doing have meaning? Who really gains from my contribution? Am I personally growing? Is the way I learn aligned with the organization’s culture? Are my personal values being fulfilled? Am I shortchanging those I love? Does what I’m doing engage my heart and enrich my spirit? Is my success based on what I take or what I give?” For the leader, courage is the capacity to bring about personal change, even move on, if the answer(s) do not resonate – if they do not strike a positive chord.





The genesis of courage is not to be found in the heroic act but in the spirit that enabled the performer to overcome their initial fear. The goals that generate the greatest degree of intensity are those thought to be beyond the assumed capacity of the team. Paradoxically, the coach is often at their most effective when they resist the need to intervene, when they choose not to speak. Indeed, the most impactful coaching question of all is often silence.²¹

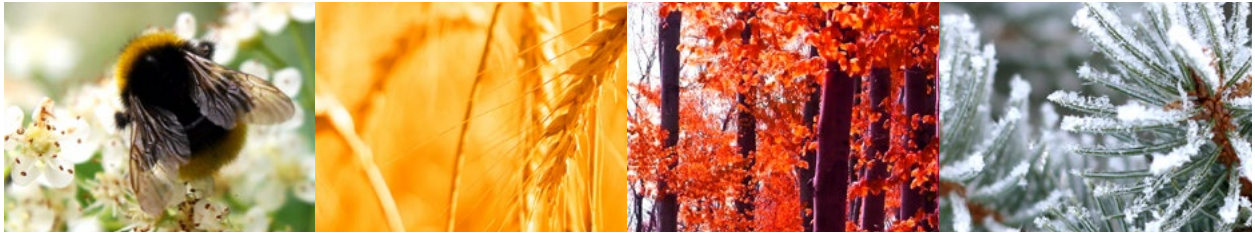
Spirit and truth cannot be separated. Here we move beyond the self-centred, manipulative mask of the egotist and embrace the empathetic honesty that is the mark of maturity and comfort with who we are. It is a truth that lies not in the head but in our authentic self – that underscores character, that shares success with others and admits failure early enough for counter measures to be put in place, that distinguishes criticism from meaningful and honest feedback, and that carries with it the ever-present echo of altruism. The truth of the mentor is one who admits, “I am part of the problem here.” The truth of the leader is one who listens to the audience, who knows what the players are capable of, where the edge of the stage is, and how to act when members of the cast fail to deliver the performance demanded.

Spirit is awakened by our beliefs. For some, these beliefs are drawn from a religious doctrine or credo. For others their beliefs are more secular in nature. Beliefs are the bedrock that anchors our view of the world. Meaning, inspiration, and success are defined by our beliefs. One need look no further than shared beliefs to understand why many not-for-profit organizations draw thousands to their banner, people who are dedicated, work long hours, and often do so for little or no remuneration.

Society is enabled and kept whole by its shared beliefs. Leaders who understand this also know that society at large sets the stage for spirit to emerge. “Choice” is no longer exclusively the prerogative of the employer. Transparency isn’t optional. Personal growth isn’t a benefit; it’s an expectation. Front-line workers want to produce products/services that they can take pride in. Can there be any greater priority than health and safety? And why would anyone be engaged by work that adds to the destruction of the planet? An organization doesn’t have a culture; they are their culture.

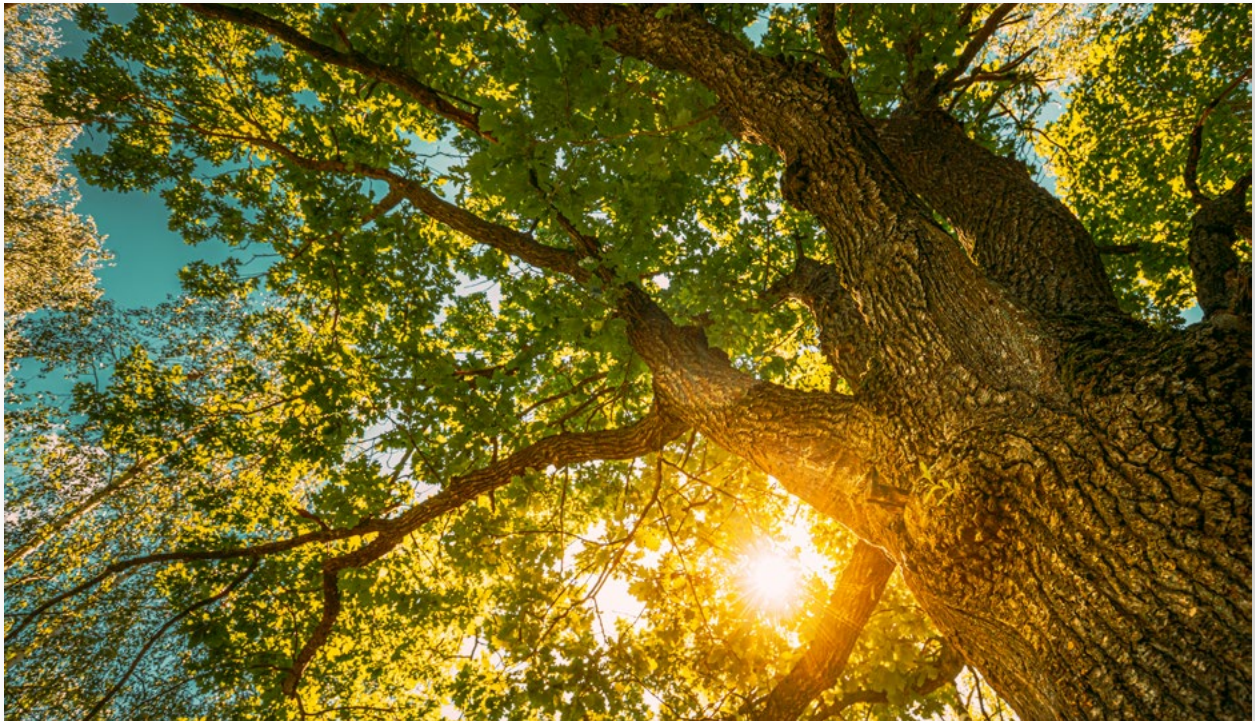
Spirit and belonging are travel companions. Each is nurtured and nourished by the other. Belonging is an inner feeling of comfort with space and time. To belong is to know that “I was meant to be here doing this work.” Belonging lies at the centre of a healthy ego, the

²¹ Research conducted by Case Western Reserve, using brain scanning techniques, reveals that the most impactful coaching support (*power to*) is to identify and move towards the coachee’s “ideal future.” Coaching a CEO, purpose, vision, values, the required business model, future leadership competencies, the needed culture and building an exceptional team being examples. Conversely, in that day-to-day priorities tend to overwhelm everything else, a coaching focus on short-term issues tend to be overwhelmed by the unfolding day-to-day drama. That does not mean potential short-term “derailers” are ignored but addressed through shared problem-solving (*power with*).

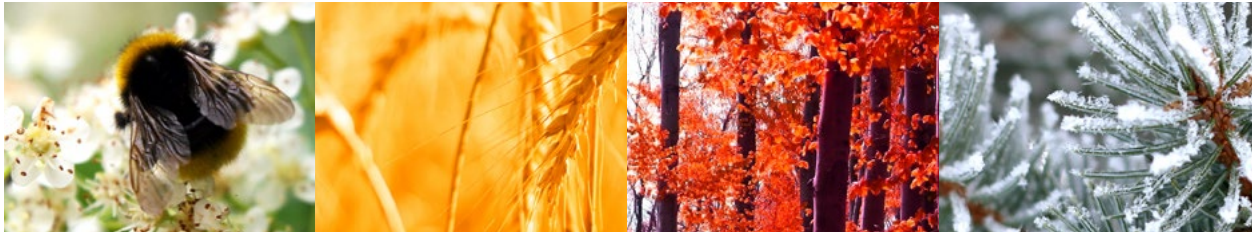


focal point of a journey that defines purpose, balance, and a sense of connection with the other elements needed to move forward. Like the rim of a wheel, a sense of belonging is constantly being redefined by the forces and pressures that exist at the edge – the domain where our own learning is at its sharpest. This inner strength that flows from belonging is, however, incomplete without a kinship with the other life forces on our planet: the changing of the seasons, plants, animals, nature, the environment. To walk in the forest with an attentive eye and a receptive spirit is to ask, “Where do I belong?” When the clay of belonging is lost as a life sustaining force, the spirit withers. To endure and grow as a leader is to be conscious of one’s sense of belonging.

It is difficult to argue against integrity. “Fairness” is a doctrine that has been part of life’s unfolding pattern since before our kind daubed images on the walls of a cave. Locking young people out of the job market invariably has long-term societal consequences. Repetitive, soul-destroying work strips those so engaged of dignity and self-respect. A fractious and militant informal culture follows. Management creates the industrial relations climate – and unions – their actions deserve! And, outsourcing work to offshore locations that use production methods based on exploitation and/or unsafe practices is an ethical virus that, sooner rather than later, migrates back to the host (the outsourcing organization).²²



22 “Fast fashion” is a case in point. Pumping out new, cheap products (sometimes on a daily basis), in some notable cases, by exploiting workers in the developing world is unsustainable.



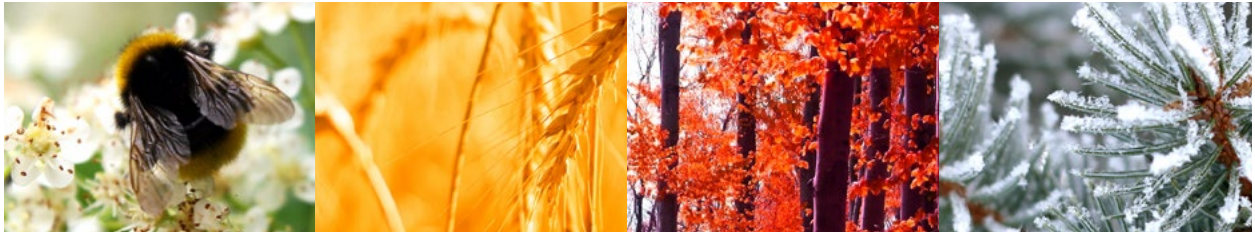
It is hard to conclude that tossing people aside like forgotten parts of a broken machine does anything other than unravel the warp of a healthy society. Discrimination, no matter how it surfaces, destroys dreams. Only those who benefit directly support executive excess in the form of extravagant lifestyles. Leadership that enriches the spirit does so by recognising, respecting, and *living up to* the beliefs of those they lead. Where the spirit is lacking, abuse and neglect often find a home. If people know that they matter relationships start to have the emotional connection that, more often than not, is missing.

Intimacy is of the spirit. To be intimate is to give of ourselves without reservation. To be intimate with another we must first be intimate with ourselves. When we gaze into the mirror we must want to know the person who stares back at us. We must be willing to cast aside the mask(s) we use to present ourselves to the world. We must develop the capacity to challenge the inner script that prompts us to act. We must be prepared to stand naked and look into the dark crevices of our inner-self. To know one's self is the secret of the master coach. To be open to input from others is a basic condition of sustainable leadership. To be aware of self is the first essential step in drawing richness out of the differences that separate us from one another. The leader's quest, when faced with resistance, conflict, or apathy, is not to try to mould the behaviour of others but to surface the discontent and to fill the space created with truth, integrity, and authenticity.

Spirit in the warrior is made whole by the balance between the fierceness necessary to draw the bow and the gentleness demanded at the release of the arrow. Spirit in the leader is manifest in the toughness needed to change the mindset, the resilience needed to overcome the unexpected, and the empathy necessary to understand the needs of those involved in the work.

Tension, emergency, and paradox fan the flames of spirit. The night is at its darkest just before the dawn. The greatest beauty is that highlighted by a simple flaw. The prodigal son is the one who, upon his return, is asked to sit closest to the fire. The light from a candle is made more apparent by the shadows that it doesn't penetrate. Success is most satisfying when the opponent is at the top of their game.

Fullness of spirit is the drumbeat of abundance. Autumn is a time when seeds planted during the spring and nourished by the warmth of the summer sun are collected for reseeded. Autumn is, thus, the time of reflection and sharing. It is a time of song. The spirit, as represented by the recent harvest, gives meaning to the planning initiated by the head, the planting orchestrated by the hand, and the bounty as embodied by the heart. But without an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the harvest, the other seasons are merely harbingers of an empty promise. Autumn is a sacred time when what we have accomplished sets the emotional context for the next cycle of seasons.



Conclusion

There is little more noble than the mighty oak. It stands proudly knowing that it has been a religious icon, the building block of an empire, a shelter for the many, and, in the hands of the artist, a joy that spans the ages. The oak grows and flourishes not because of the primacy of one season but because of the enduring balance between the seasons.

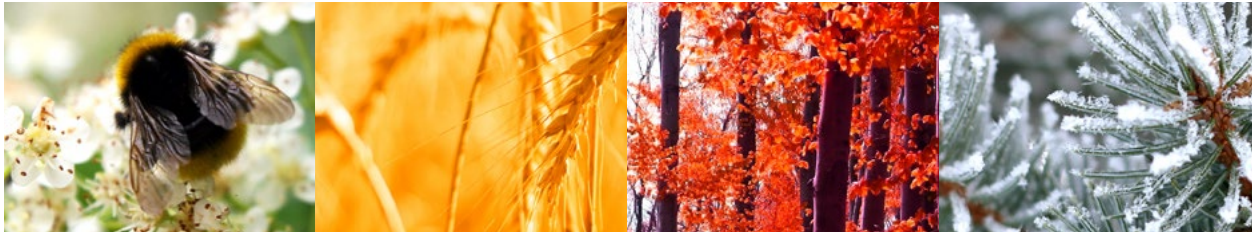
At first appearance our leadership oak appears strong and healthy. It stands tall and continues to grow. But is it healthy? We can't tell by simply looking at what we see. There is little gained by listening to its extended branches rustling in the wind. To know – really know – we have to examine the roots.

Leadership is ultimately about balance. Leadership lies not in any single skill or quality but in the overall weave. Balance draws on the strategy of the head and the processes and systems that are of the hand. Without healthy roots, without the heart and spirit, however, the oak cannot survive. With the first major storm, high wind, drought, if the roots do not go deep, this mighty mass will crash to the ground. Wisdom remains an untapped commodity, change initiatives falter, mergers fail, talent takes the mercenary path, and people become disillusioned when winter and spring are not complemented by the full flowering of summer and autumn.

The leader who wants to be the difference that makes a difference cannot depend on a root system that is shallow or fragile. Businesspeople whose approach is limited to the head and the hand do not, in any substantive meaning of the word, deliver leadership. By the same token, leaders whose only appeal is to the heart and spirit are charting a journey without a destination. Leaders, who leave a legacy, those who take people where they would otherwise not go, who compete successfully for people's dreams *employ the head, empower the hand, engage the heart, **and** enrich the spirit.*

“We are not thinking machines.
We are feeling machines that think.”

– Antonio Damasio



Creating Tomorrow's Leadership Today: Transformative Discussion Topics for the Team

1. If you are operating today pretty much the way you were only five years ago, fail now it will save time later.
2. If you are not measuring the culture you have and, especially, the culture you need, the success criteria that underscore hiring, coaching, talent management, and the succession process amount to little more than a “best guess.”
3. If your library of forward-looking leadership competencies fails to capture behaviours that employ the head, empower the hand, engage the heart, and enrich the spirit you will, inevitably, become more of what you have always been.
4. If you are not retooling the way the organization is designed, introducing AI is about to become a very frustrating endeavour.
5. If purpose, a sense of belonging, meaningful values, personal growth, and a degree of choice around hybrid employment are found wanting, know that quiet quitting and costly turnover defines your future.
6. How people learn is, in many senses, more important than what they learn. If learning how to learn and learning as a process of self-discovery is missing for your development agenda, expect to be overwhelmed by the future speed of change.
7. If leadership balance isn't central to everything to do with leadership, know that your emerging culture will become unmanageable.



ORXESTRA® INC.

The Head, the Hand, the Heart, and the Spirit represent the underlying philosophy of the products, tools, and processes that fall under the Orxestra® brand. Talent acquisition, coaching, team assessment, culture measurement, succession, executive integration, and leadership workshops all recognise, reiterate, and reinforce the importance of “leadership balance.”



John O. Burdett

“There is a yearning in the land – a cry for something beyond that being offered.”

JOHN O. BURDETT has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world’s largest corporations.

In 2019, his work with ABB’s top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year. His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached

numerous executive teams around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, he has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His Leadership Beyond Crisis Series came out in 2021. In 2022, in addition to a number of leading-edge articles, he brought out a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: *Without Breaking Stride*.

