LEADERSHIP: UNCOMMON SENSE

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UNCOMMON SENSE

Recently, while giving an interview, the interviewer asked me, "Isn't leadership just a matter of common sense?" The question left me a little flatfooted. I was not sure how to respond. Based simply on the volumes written on the subject, leadership seems to be both extremely common and extremely rare. The bookstore shelves are full of the latest secrets to leadership success. I am critical of much of this literature for reducing the development of leaders to a set of superficial skills, steps, and easily followed recipes: just add water, stir and instant leader. From this perspective, leadership appears to be easily developed and common. On the other hand, if the market for these materials is as huge as it seems, then successful leaders must be hard to find. Who is buying these books, if not potential leaders who are struggling to figure it out, desperate for the magic formula, yet perhaps not realizing that the last book's set of prescriptions did not help all that much? While all this activity is going on, credible observers are claiming with increasing frequency that we are facing a national leadership crisis of unparalleled proportions.

What sense can we make of all this? There is no question that the need is real. Managers at all levels, in all industries, really are trying to figure it out. Some are taking their development as a leader seriously. Many are seduced by the promise of a short cut to greatness.

After a moment of hesitation, I found myself saying to the interviewer, "If leadership were just common sense, it would be common. The fact that it is not common, despite all the activity to develop it, suggests that, if short-cuts were possible, we would have all bought the package long ago and would now be enjoying the fruits of success."

I believe that leadership development *is* possible and that it is needed for people at all levels of our organizations, but that it requires something far beyond––in fact, deeper than––common sense.

Not long ago I was a participant in a leadership workshop. Concerned that the workshop was leading us away from the hard and often painful work of personal change, I recited the following poem, *The Well Of Grief*, by David Whyte:

> ***Those who will not slip beneath the still surface on the well of grief turning downward through its black water to the place we cannot breathe will never know the source from which we drink, the secret water, cold and clear, nor find in the darkness glimmering the small round coins thrown by those who wished for something else.***

The instructor's response was common. "That's beautiful! Now we're going after those gold coins." I found it interesting how easy it was to miss the wisdom contained in the first few lines––the illusion being that we could somehow find a quick and easy way to get those coins. The workshop proceeded to give us a few simple techniques that would "transform our lives." The workshop did not challenge us to explore the deeper longings and aspirations that might define the nature

and direction of our leadership. It did not confront us with facing up to how we might have compromised our own vision in our pursuit of caution and safety. It never mentioned that there is a long-term discipline involved with self/leadership development. It provided techniques––actually, very useful techniques––but techniques without the context of the long-term journey of developing our leadership.

Leadership skills and techniques are useful, but there is no short cut to greatness. It takes deeper developmental work. Leadership is an uncommon sense because most do not undertake this work as a lifelong discipline. It is more common to toss coins at the surface and "wish for something else."

Leadership is connected with the deepest parts of ourselves. It has much more to do with character, courage, and conviction than it does with specific skills or even competencies. Leadership requires wisdom, self-knowledge, and the development of our character at psychological and spiritual levels. This paper will attempt to accomplish two objectives. First, it will build a case for the necessity of an in-depth approach to leadership development––at all levels of the organization––accompanied by the difficult work of systems change. Second, it will describe the terrain of leadership development, that is, the major disciplines that need to be integrated into one's life for genuine development to take place.

Its depth, its long-term nature, and its focus define the developmental process outlined in this paper.

Leadership development is deeply personal. It involves working with the psyche and the soul. True leadership springs from an elevated state of being. It requires a fundamental shift of mind and consciousness. This type of change is threatening for everyone (the author included) and so it is naturally resisted. My profession (training and development) generally colludes with the resistance by cautiously proposing more palatable, less threatening, superficial approaches. The latest five-steps-to-leadership model is a much easier sell than the deep work proposed in this paper.

Leadership development is long-term because systems do not change quickly—especially our systems of thinking. No matter how much we are addicted to the quick fix, all of the available evidence tells us that change is hard and long—whether we are changing our organization or our consciousness.
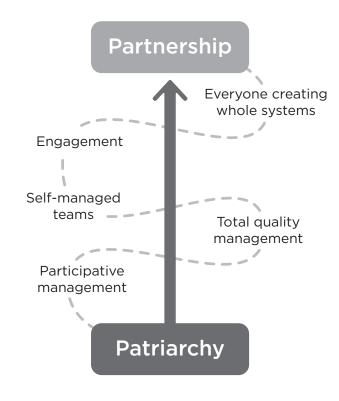
And finally, leadership development requires a focus on the core disciplines outlined in this paper. To become masterful at anything, from a sport to the practice of law, a regular discipline of learning and practice is necessary. The same is true of leadership. The modern manager has become a master at responding to every stimulus, navigating "permanent white water" (Vaill, 1989). While this is an important ability, transformative learning does not take place in the fray (with no space in our lives for reflection and learning). We must learn to create regular space and time to focus on the essential disciplines of leadership. The payoff comes with long-term attention.

Courage, character, compassion and conviction are the stuff of leadership. These are not common attributes and there is no short cut to them. It is my conviction that only through a deep, long-term discipline will the leadership emerge to guide us through the organizational, national, and global problems that we face today.

COMMON DILEMMAS

In this section, I hope to make the case that leadership development of the depth described in this paper is a requirement at all levels of the organization in these changing times. I will ground my case in the transition through which most organizations are traveling––the shift from patriarchy to partnership––and the psychological/spiritual dilemmas that transition is creating for people at all levels. I will also attempt to show how neglecting this deeper developmental work undermines the organization's intention to transform.

A great deal of learning has taken place over the last generation as Global business searches for answers to the challenge of global competition. There seems to be a genuine consensus that, if the specific answers are not always clear, the direction is. And that direction is away from patriarchy and top-down control, and toward self-management (asking people to take more and more responsibility for success). In organizations all over the world, people at lower levels are becoming substantively involved in managing the business, shaping its future and its organizational form. Some businesses are undertaking this transition because competitive pressures and the demands of rapidly changing environments demand it; others are undertaking the transition because it is good for the human spirit and creativity. Whatever the reason, engaging this transition means in part that control and authority need to be redistributed. But it also means that there needs to be more initiative and self-regulation throughout the organization. In other words, a letting go of control at every level to people below, and an accepting of significantly higher risk and leadership responsibility at lower levels. Leadership is not a zero-sum game. Our organizations need more leadership at all levels.
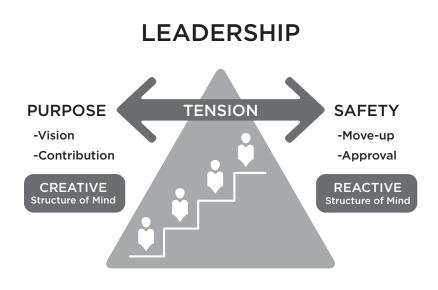

As anyone who has tried it can testify, this is harder than it sounds. Developing leadership within an organization raises at least two serious dilemmas. The first of these is inherent in organizational life, one of the hallmarks of which is that most organizations today are patriarchal in nature. On the day we report for work, we form a patriarchal bargain with the organization (Block, 1987). The organization in effect says to us: "Welcome! We now own you. Your job is to submit to authority, because around here wisdom increases with altitude. In return for your submission, loyalty, and sacrifice we'll take good care of you. Play your cards right, and great things can come your way." Generally speaking, this is a seductive bargain. We may even feel lucky to have made it, and we work hard to live up to it. In so doing, we make the bargain—and its inevitability—stronger.

This bargain is seductive because we enter these structures with our own need to stay safe and move up by winning approval. Since most of us are unconscious of these deep drives, few of us notice that they are the genesis of patriarchy.

We work, in part, to earn a living, pay the mortgage, put the kids through school, secure our financial future, and retire comfortably. None of us is immune to the deep need for safety and security and seeing work as the primary means. In addition to this, many of us are constantly looking up to see how we're doing and where we're going. *Moving up* is the promise; it may even be the reason we began working in a larger organization in the first place. This is a get-ahead culture, and there are few of us indeed who can envision remaining where we are without feelings of frustration or failure. We should be, we ought to be, we need to be, and *we have to* be moving up! And moving up requires the approval of those who have already done so. To fall from grace is a dangerous act. So the approval of our superiors (in position, if not in character) begins to determine our behavior. We do whatever it takes to get their approval, and we limit our risk and exposure to disapproval. Our safety seems to demand it.

Looking up, the form this takes is *dependency*. We act dependently when we manipulatively manage what we do/say or do not do/say as a strategy to stay safe, move up and win approval (Block, 1987). Dependency is hard to reconcile with courage. If leadership requires courage, and if we have bought into the organizational need to keep our heads down, then leadership is a stretch. Looking down the safest path is to *control*. Control is valued as strong leadership by those above and it also seems the best way to limit the risk of having egg on our face because someone below makes a mistake. If future leadership requires empowerment and letting go, then the part of us that has control mixed up with safety is in the way.

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But, that is not the whole story; if it were, we would not have a dilemma. A dilemma requires two opposing needs, the resolution of one precluding the other need from being met. While one part of us is working to stay safe, win approval, and move up, another part of us is longing to live a purposeful life and to make a significant contribution through our work. Most of us harbor a vision for work about which we are passionate. The dilemma is that the freedom, vision, and passion (that are both the foundations and the benefits of leadership) are incompatible with organizational safety, approval seeking, and advancement. We cannot pursue both safety and freedom simultaneously. Caution and courage are mutually exclusive. There is no safe way to be great; and to pursue greatness is to live on the frontier (Block, 1987). We need to make a choice; and, the choice we make determines the nature and extent of our leadership, as well as the corporate culture we contribute to creating.

The point here is that patriarchy has its roots in our individual maps of identity; that is, the conclusions we have made in our life about what will make us safe and worthwhile. Therefore, when attempting to change the organization from patriarchy to partnership, we run smack into ourselves as the primary obstacle. What is needed is personal reflection and insight. We need to discover/rediscover a vision worth the risk and learn how the structure of our own thinking exaggerates much of what we fear in organizational life. Differentiating perceived from real risks—when we ourselves are responsible for our misperceptions—is the path to managing this dilemma.
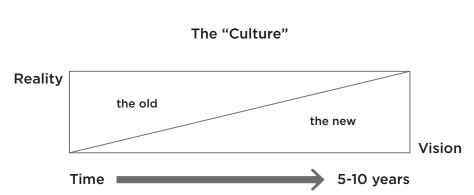
The most surprising discovery from the last 15 years of observing organizational change, has come through watching committed leaders unable to walk their talk. I naively thought commitment and buy-in were enough. When people at all levels are not challenged to inquire deeply into the dilemma described above, change bogs down. It does so through a wide variety of familiar behaviors. I challenge you to examine these with one eye on what you have seen in your organization and one eye on what you have seen in yourself:

- People are often more concerned with how they are doing than with what they are doing. Doing things right (as defined by corporate norms) rather than doing the right things.

- People over-control even though their intention is to empower (e.g., requiring that others attend a personal empowerment workshop).

- People avoid conflict by not bringing up the real issues that must be addressed if the organization is to move forward.

- People pass ideas for change up the ladder to get permission to move ahead, and then blow up when permission is denied or, worse, there is no answer at all.

- People expect top management to have all the answers, to provide the charismatic vision, and to fix the messes—so that they don't have to.

- People blame others for problems and claim no share of complicity themselves.

- People wait for the culture to change, for mixed messages to be clarified, and for guarantees of success before investing something of themselves in the change.

- People appear to believe that vision and direction must come first from above, and that their job is to receive it, perhaps via inter-office mail—rather than to co-create the future of the organization of which they are a part.

- People say what they're expected to say in meetings, and then have the real conversations in the rest room afterwards (Block, 1987).

This type of behavior limits or completely blocks progress on an organization's journey from patriarchy to partnership. They have their source in the deeply rooted structures of consciousness. And only a deep and sustained discipline can effect genuine change in the nature of our leadership.

The second dilemma is no less serious. Organizational change takes time, perhaps as long as five to fifteen years. In our fast food society, the long-term nature of change becomes a dilemma.

Change is characterized by a discrepancy between current reality and our vision of a future reality (Fritz, 1989). The more visionary the leadership, the greater is the discrepancy. Early on in the change process, where the old culture is struggling to give way to a new one, the harsh reality we face

The "Culture"

Reality

the old

the new

Vision

Time ⟶ 5-10 years

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is that most of what we see going on is the old culture. There is very little evidence that anyone is serious about the vision. Most of us want to give up at this point because what we want seems impossible, because it hurts to keep a dream alive in the midst of such overwhelming evidence that meaningful change is not forthcoming, and because we think change should somehow feel differently and proceed more rapidly. Yet, the above diagram suggests that the process of change cannot meet our expectations of it. Vision is an expression of what we are not––and longing to become. The reason we hold a vision is to sustain effort over time to change the way things are. In effect, new vision highlights our dissatisfaction with the status quo and creates expectations for a better future. This is just the nature of the beast. Yet for some reason we think that because we can talk it, we ought to be able to walk it. We are not used to living with important discrepancies for long periods of time. We expect change quickly––after all, it happens fast at the movies or on TV. We are not hardened to the real task of leadership, committing early––not waiting until there is ample evidence of success––and sustaining long term effort toward the vision in the midst of mixed support from those around us.

This is where courage comes in. "Walking our talk" is hard; it may even be impossible to completely reconcile what we say we want with what we see around us for long intervals during systems change. The pressure to compromise our "talk" is overwhelming, when we know we can't live up to it in the short term. There's also a temptation to "walk" as if we are already there; but, if a superficial claim of accomplishment we have not really achieved is stressful for the claimant, imagine how frustrating it is to all those who can clearly see the difference between the claim and the reality. Maintaining momentum and energy in the midst of a long transition is at the heart of leadership. The ability to maintain focus on the right issues is one key to resolving this dilemma, as is the promotion of authenticity and dialogue in the organization. Bringing the rest room conversations into the real meetings is both risky and essential.

Why are these dilemmas worth taking on? Because we have no choice but to engage them. The world is telling us our organizations must change. Systemic organizational change is possible only when it is accompanied by personal change at all levels.

We must develop leadership because we cannot change organizations without it. And, at the heart of the patriarchal cultures we are trying to shed, lies the way we have organized our thinking; our maps of identity––the ways we define our worth and achieve safety––and our addiction to quick effortless fixes. As one manager told me, "How did we ever think we could transform this place without being transformed?"

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CHANGING PARADIGMS

In this section of the paper, I want to make the case for a profound shift of mind and character as a prerequisite for leadership in the future. A more popular term for this is "paradigm shift." I call the current, more common paradigm, the "problem-reacting" structure. The rarer, more challenging paradigm for leadership and life—the one I wish to describe for you in detail in this paper—I call the "outcome-creating" structure. This shift is one of the central paradigm shifts for leadership in the future.

Many these days are using the phrase "paradigm shift" for an organizational change or a personal insight. From what I understand of Thomas Kuhn's original work on paradigm shifts, however, I suspect that the term has not only become so common as to be meaningless, but also that the nature of a paradigm shift—its breath and depth, in particular—is frequently misrepresented in the popular press. I like the way Kuhn originally described the process of shifting paradigms. He said, in effect, that the shift is so profound that those who are experiencing it are scarcely aware of the change as it is happening. The change is so subtle and so incremental that only in looking back on it can it be described and understood. Popularists who apply the term to a simple change of perspective or point of view—as in "My goal for this year is to shift my paradigm about self-management"—are missing the point.

The process of becoming a more powerful leader requires a paradigm shift of the deeper kind. Because this shift is so profound, there is no formula to follow to get from where we are to where we want to be. However, we can describe where we are in some detail, and we can describe the new model of leadership as well. We can describe them both because most of us have experience in both. Kuhn describes the situation in which the old paradigm is fading and the new is establishing itself: people experience and practice out of both models alternately or simultaneously over a long period as the old dies and the new is born. We all have experience in the new leadership model as I will describe it, just as we have experience in the traditional model.

I used the term "structure" above in reference to the old and new paradigms for leadership. The systems approach to thinking about how the world works has taught us that the structure of things determines their performance and behavior. Just as the designer of a ship exerts more influence on its performance than does the captain or the crew, the structure of our thinking (and its corresponding influence on the system's design) is the primary determinant of our actions and thereby the pattern of results we are getting in our lives and through our work (Senge, 1990). A change in the central organizing structures of our thinking (shifting our paradigm) eventually translates into a change in the results we are creating. Actions and results that were not possible before become possible. Potential futures dismissed as wishful thinking become probable. All that is required is changing the life stance we use to create results. It is that simple and that difficult.
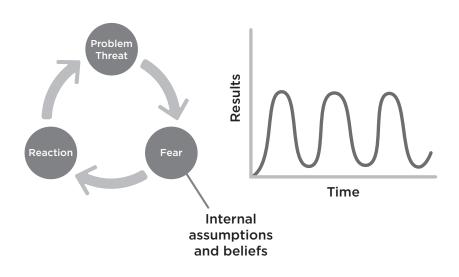
I think of these two states as contrasting "life stances" because we use or apply them so widely in our lives. (Leadership is not restricted to organizational life.) Both these life stances serve us, but in very different ways. The problem-reacting stance is what we use to protect ourselves from danger and threat; we use the outcome-creating stance when we want to bring something we care about into being. I believe that we have a tendency to spend too much time in the problem-reacting stance, and not enough in the outcome-creating stance. In the simplest terms, I believe that becoming a leader involves shifting one's stance toward more habitual use of this outcome-creating stance.

One critical characteristic of the problem-reacting life stance is that it is focused on removing what we do not want (problems, obstacles, threats, deviations from normal, etc.). When this structure is driving our behavior, we tend to "move away from" problems and obstacles (or—more likely—move away from the unpleasant emotions generated by the problem) in order to make them go away. Our overriding goal is to get "back to normal." Even the most efficient problem-solving strategies are designed to leave us without the problem, in a state of equilibrium—back where we started from. So what's the problem? No problem, if back to normal is where you want to go. However, the task of leadership is generally not the maintenance of normal, but creating a new future reality. The illusion of the problem-reacting paradigm is that we could somehow create the future by removing obstacles. We tried that with urban renewal, it didn't work.

Another critical characteristic of this structure is that it is driven by fear. The problem-reacting structure becomes especially insidious when our anxiety—our inner, emotional conflict—becomes our most important problem. As this happens, we take action to "solve" our anxiety—often times at the expense of solving the *real* problem or taking action to create the future we want. This structure becomes even more insidious because it works; and the fact that it works, makes it self-rewarding. In other words, we react to feeling bad either by leaping into action or avoiding action. The effect of these actions is that we feel better in the short run. Because we got what we want–-to feel better–-we reinforce the continued use of this structure.

A REACTIVE structure of mind seeks EQUILIBRIUM between current reality and beliefs.

When our primary goal is to feel better, however, two undesirable side effects more than likely result. First, because the goal is to resolve the anxiety quickly, we tend to jump to a quick fix rather than address the real issue. This virtually assures that the problem will be back. Second, because the action we take was principally designed to alleviate anxiety, the energy that motivates our action dissipates the more successful we are. The consequence of this is that we stop taking action and the problem returns.
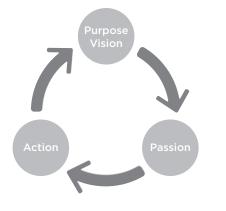
Notice that I draw the problem-reacting structure as an endless loop: problems create anxiety and inner conflict; we react to this anxiety. If our reactions are successful in reducing the problem, we feel better. Because we feel better, we reduce action until the problem comes back and kicks off our anxiety again. I am confident that anyone who is reading this paper can quickly think of a personal or organizational problem that you saw yesterday, you are seeing today, and you expect to see tomorrow—in spite of your past, current, and future attempts to solve it. It may even seem to you that the harder you try to solve it, the more it keeps coming back! I suggest to you that when this happens, the problem-reacting structure is in control of your personal or organizational behavior. In systems terminology, you are experiencing oscillation—a pattern of behavior that is a natural consequence of this structure.
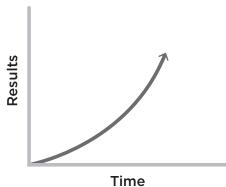
Often managers will say, "This is not my problem. I'm pro-active not reactive." What passes for pro-active leadership is often reactiveness in drag. Rapid response to problems is the highest praise we can give to a manager. We call these managers pro-active because they are on top of a problem before it happens or before it reaches crisis proportions. The only thing wrong with this type of pro-activeness is that it becomes all-consuming. Managers move from one crisis to the next with little time to breathe and the cycle never ends because the problems keep coming back. This is one of the reasons why we see so many senior managers constantly buried in operational detail. I remember interviewing a senior manager and asking how often his team took time to plan for the future. He smiled and said, "We don't have time to plan. It's just too crazy around here for that." Creating the future requires much more than fixing the current crisis. It means stepping back from the urgency of the moment and taking action that will usher in a new future over time. Such action often requires living with the anxiety rather than fixing it. The outcome-creating structure is more conducive to this type of long-term attention.

Just as this oscillating pattern of behavior is no doubt familiar to you, you are also likely to be acquainted with its alternative. Have you ever produced an important result in your life or work, something that you wanted for its own sake––simply because it mattered, something that turned out pretty much as you had envisioned it, something that you can look on now with pride? I believe that everyone has had such an experience, whether it's a high-school diploma, a successful relationship, a completed craft project, or a new business venture. Each of us has a natural tendency to create results that matter; to bring into being something that never existed before, and to create futures consistent with our aspirations and values. After all, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, we are made in the image of the Creator. I believe that to create, to bring what matters most into being, is one of the highest of human capacities. The problem-reacting structure buries this capacity beneath our desire for comfort and safety. The outcome-creating structure makes full use of this innate capacity and is a more effective structure for creating what matters most.

The outcome-creating life stance is not focused on what we do not want, but on envisioned results. In addition, this structure derives its energy from a very different set of emotions: *love* is not too strong a word for them. And the resulting pattern of behavior is characterized by growth rather than oscillation. It becomes possible to get results and to keep getting more results. Why? Because as we act out of the desire or love we feel for the results we want, and as we see those results come into being, our energy for seeking these results increases. This does not mean that when creating you do not experience anxiety or problems. It does mean that your relationship to them is different. As creators, we may live with the anxiety of maintaining a discrepancy between current reality and vision for long periods of time (Fritz, 1989). Problems and anxiety are not used to guide action. They are noticed and understood, but action is based on what gets us to the vision. In this structure, we experience what the systems thinkers call sustainable growth. And in the process, we are much more likely to develop systemic, long-term solutions for the messes we sometimes find ourselves in. In fact, that is what you would naturally expect from a structure that is vision-oriented and driven by the desire to create results that matter to us.

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These two life stances differ fundamentally. Nearly everyone I have spoken to about these issues can see evidence of both in their personal and/or organizational lives. Nearly everyone also sees the serious, negative consequences of the problem-reacting life stance when it becomes the only way we know. Imagine the long-term effects of continual problem solving as I've described it. No matter how good at it you are, the problems always come back. The best you can hope for is to get back to normal, back to where you started. Because this is the structure most of us have learned for creating our future, it's no surprise that we see far more powerlessness than empowerment–– powerlessness that translates into behaviors we can fairly label "dependency." It's no wonder that we see the frantic search for one quick fix after another—even though we all see that these don't work. It's no wonder that people work very hard every day, only to feel that they are barely staying in one place—with real progress out of reach. It's no wonder that we are always so busy and tired.

It's also no surprise that people in organizations are skeptical about change. They have a history of trying to use a life stance, a structure of thinking that is designed to go back to normal for creating desired futures. We are intensely well acculturated into this stance: we are rewarded for being good "fire-fighters"; we are taught that it's not OK to feel fearful or anxious, so we do whatever we can to make these feelings go away; we are the willing recipients of marketing messages about simple and quick ways to fix our hair, our odor, our children, our economy, and our lives; and we respect and revere people of action, people who achieve instant success, people who make us feel better. But we can't build or create the lives and organizations we want out of a life stance designed to make things go away. The kind of structure we hold in our minds tends to produce results consistent with that structure. If that structure is one predominantly driven by fear and characterized by oscillation, then that is what we will see being produced in our lives and our work. If, on the other hand, the structure we are most familiar with is one driven by love and desire and capable of sustained production of important results, then that is what we will experience.

Transforming an organization or transforming oneself requires a different structure than we have used in these matters before. Research has shown that every criterion for success (such as, happiness, health, income, inner peace, etc.) is positively correlated with this thinking structure, or what I call the outcome-creating life stance. Shifting one's life from the habitual use of the problem-reacting structure to the habitual use of the outcome-creating structure is the primary developmental challenge of becoming a leader. It means learning how to cultivate creative tension.

CREATIVE TENSION

I have said that the outcome-creating life stance is the basis of real leadership, that it can be thought of as a deep new paradigm for personal and organizational behavior, and that it represents a structure that naturally tends to produce the results we want, rather than get us back to where we started. Now I would like to explore that structure on a deeper and more specific level.

In describing the outcome-creating stance, I referred to our awareness of the results we want to create. I call this picture of our intended result our "vision," and I will discuss what a vision is and how you get one later on in this paper. For the time being, it's enough to know that in order to create a result, you must have an idea of that result in your mind, clearly enough that you would recognize the result if you indeed created it. (If this seems overly simple or simplistic, remember that in the problem-reacting stance we act without a result in mind other than being without

the problem or being free of the obstacle.) This vision of the results you want to create is one component of the structure that is at the heart of leadership.
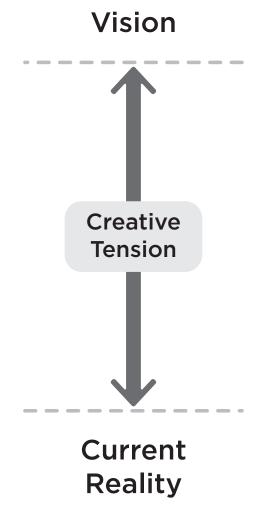
A second structural component follows naturally from the first. Before you can take action on the result you want, you have to be aware of what you have to work with. Before you can take a step toward where you want to go, you have to know where you are right now. You must know all you can about your current situation, or as I call it, your "current reality." The trick here is not to get stuck in trying to fix current reality––just learn about it. Creators have something much bigger in mind (vision) than a fixed problem or removed obstacle. If your vision is clear and so is your grasp of current reality, then you immediately notice the third and most powerful component of the outcome-creating structure. You notice the gap between what you have now and what you eventually want to have or create. Your awareness of this gap creates a positive force I call "creative tension." Much of what I know about creative tension is from the work of Robert Fritz, author of *The Path of Least Resistance*. Fritz describes this creative tension as a common and natural phenomenon:

> ***Examples [of creative tension] abound from everyday life. I feel hungry (tension) so I eat lunch (tension relieved). I turn on a light switch (tension) and the light is illuminated (tension relieved). The autumn sun and cooler temperatures combine to produce changes (tension) in the chemical composition in leaves, and the leaves change color and are released from the trees (tension relieved). Blow air into a balloon (tension) and let go of the balloon and watch it fly around the room (tension relieved)***
>
> *(Fritz, 1989).*

Vision

Creative Tension

Current Reality

Notice that the natural tendency of creative tension is to resolve itself. It's as if you stretched a rubber band between one hand, representing vision, and the other, representing current reality. Were you to do this, you would feel the tension between them. You would also be aware of the energy stored in the stretched rubber band––energy that tries to pull your hands together. In other words, the tension wants to resolve itself (Fritz, 1989).

In the same way, creative tension is a force that tries to bring your current reality into alignment with your vision. If we develop the discipline of focusing our attention on the results we

most want while simultaneously telling the truth about current reality (without trying to quick fix it), then the natural tendency of this structure is to resolve by current reality changing over time to meet the vision (Fritz, 1989). Cultivating and maintaining creative tension is the central discipline of the outcome-creating life stance. It is the engine that fuels sustained growth. Leaders become masterful at cultivating it because they have learned that this discrepancy is not the enemy, but a friendly and powerful force for change.

However, establishing creative tension is not as easy as it seems, especially if the problem-reacting structure is an unconscious habit. As we become aware of the results we want and of our current reality, the gap between them may cause anxiety for us. To want something very important to us and to realize we do not yet have it can kick off feelings of fear and danger, inadequacy, or desperation. This is *tension* of a far different kind. It is extremely tempting to react to this anxiety, take sudden or inappropriate action to reduce the negative feelings, and find ourselves firmly stuck in the problem-reacting stance despite our best intentions.

There are a couple of all too familiar ways we use to reduce the anxiety connected with creative tension. One common strategy is to compromise our vision, to deny what we really want (Fritz, 1989). It makes us feel better (in the short run) to say that, well, we never really wanted that anyway. A second strategy is to distort current reality, and there are many ways of doing so. We can claim that current reality is remarkably close to our vision; after all, things are not so bad. Or we can simply refuse to see aspects of current reality that make us uncomfortable—a practice that also has dangerous long-term consequences. The reason most people are unfamiliar with creative tension is because these two strategies are so pervasive that they are "normal." They are the primary strategies of the problem-reacting structure and are antithetical to leadership.

The anxiety that comes with creative tension is normal; we all experience it. However, we have a choice. We can react to the anxiety, or we can focus our attention on results and consider our anxiety just one more component of our current reality.

This is a subtle yet powerful distinction, and it brings us closer to describing why developing our leadership requires life long discipline. Leaders sustain, even seek out, creative tension. They refuse to trap themselves into reacting to the inevitable anxiety. They do not ignore these negative feelings; to the contrary, they are students of their own fears. But they know that creative tension— which they learn to feel just as explicitly as you might have felt the tension in a rubber band—is the best source of the energy it takes to create the results they want.

To that end, I suggest that there are eight disciplines that promote and sustain a shift into the outcome-creating stance of genuine leadership. Most of these are inner disciplines, that is, they are work that the leader does within himself or herself. As Warren Bennis said, "The leader's work is inner work." Some of the disciplines are related to taking action. The rest of this paper describes these disciplines.

The Inner Disciplines are:

- The ongoing discernment of a **personal purpose** worthy of our deepest commitment

- Translating that purpose into a **vision** of a desired future

- **Choosing** or fully committing oneself to that future

- Facing and inquiring into the **fears and inner obstacles** that limit us

- Developing **intuition** to balance and guide rational analysis

The Action Disciplines are:

- Learning to **think systemically** and design new systems

- Authentically and courageously engaging in **dialogue** as we pursue our vision in cooperation with others

- Developing leadership **learning communities**.

Leaders remain focused on a vision that matters and continue to look systematically at current reality—in spite of the anxiety this process arouses. Obviously, not just any vision will do—only a vision you care deeply about establishes creative tension. The vision must be important to you, one you desire and love enough to risk for, and one that is connected to what I call your personal purpose as an individual. The energy in creative tension comes from the passion generated when pursuing results aligned with our deeper sense of purpose. Discovering and exploring this sense of purpose is the first discipline of leadership.

INNER LEADERSHIP DISCIPLINES

Purpose

Warren Bennis, in his book *On Becoming a Leader,* states that all of the leaders he interviewed agreed on the following points:

> *They all agree that leaders are made, not born, and made more by themselves than by any external means… They agree that no leader sets out to be a leader per se, but rather to express him/herself freely and fully… Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple, and it's also that difficult… First and foremost, find out what it is you're about, and be that.*

The ongoing discovery and exploration of our sense of purpose is the central discipline of the outcome-creating stance. It is the starting place for true leadership development.

The power to create what matters in the face of sometimes difficult circumstances comes from within. It comes from passion and conviction. Passion is the energizing force of creative tension and the outcome-creating stance. Passion has its source in knowing what our purpose is, in knowing what we are here to learn, become, and do with our lives. Most people are unfamiliar with a deep and abiding sense of purpose, not because they don't have one, but because they have not integrated a discipline of spiritual attention into their life.

My favorite description of what the process of discovering purpose is like is found in Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. The young poet of the title wrote to Rilke and enclosed samples of his work for critique. Rather than critique the poems, Rilke responded with some advice about the whole issue of why one would write poetry in the first place—and in so doing, gave a crystal clear description of personal purpose:

> ***You ask whether your verses are good. You ask me. You have asked others before. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are disturbed when certain editors reject your efforts. Now (since you have asked me to advise you) I beg you to give up all that. You are looking outward, and that above all you should not do now. Nobody can counsel and help you, nobody. There is only one single way. Go into yourself. Search for the reason that bids you write; find out whether it is spreading out its roots in the deepest places of your heart, acknowledge to yourself whether you would have to die if it were denied you to write. This above all—ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: Must I write? Delve into yourself for a deep answer. And if this should be affirmative, if you may meet this earnest question with a strong and simple "I must," then build your life according to this necessity; your life even into its most indifferent and slightest hour must be a sign of this urge and a testimony to it.***

How many of us have inquired that deeply into ourselves? How many know what we "must" do or be? I submit that this kind of deep conviction and passion is uncommon, and as long as it is, genuine leadership will also remain uncommon.

Each of us is a unique spiritual entity. With that, comes our own unique longings and gifts for expressing that uniqueness in the world. We also have a host of experiences and waves of conditioning that make our uniqueness difficult to identify and take seriously. We are acculturated and taught to define our identity and safety upon getting ahead, winning, gaining approval, and meeting others' expectations. When pursuing our purpose conflicts with these maps of identity, it is easy to lose sight of our own deeper longings. Our soul is then, in effect, held captive by our well-conditioned problem-reacting strategies. It's very hard to even begin the search for true purpose when we are in the habit of reacting to stay safe. And so, we come back to the original dilemma presented earlier; we cannot pursue both safety and purpose simultaneously. We must make a choice. The soul is not interested in safety. The soul knows what it longs for and it is unwilling to compromise. This is the most important choice we make in life. It also determines the nature and quality of our leadership.

Our life has been speaking to us for a long time about what matters most. It has been leaving clues. It remains for us to have the courage to maintain a discipline of attention to the subtle way our soul calls to us. I frequently work with people on a simple process I call "life listening." It involves

reflecting on times in our lives when we felt most alive and also identifying times when life was as bad as it gets. When people compare these two sets of experiences, and abstract from them the elements that seemed to be present in the former and absent in the latter, they often begin to notice themes and patterns. In these life experiences lie the clues to our purpose, and for most of us clues are all we get. Paying attention to these clues, letting them point the way to our deeper longings, and defining which of these longings are "musts" is the work of this discipline.

We can find out a lot by being open to what our life experiences are trying to tell us. Some of what we find is confirming, some of it we might rather not know. Perhaps we have a deep sense of something unfinished in our lives, despite being outwardly successful. Perhaps we discover that what seems to satisfy us most is not what people want to pay us for. Perhaps we keep finding ourselves thinking about a different kind of work or about something we've always wanted to pursue but never have. Perhaps we are pained and plagued by the feeling that what we are doing is not what we were meant to do. I believe that we are continually trying to tell ourselves something about purpose, and that we have only to pay attention to learn something profoundly important.

I believe that the task of life, in a nutshell, is to discover our purpose and to build a life upon it. Sound simple? There are a number of complications: There are plenty of pressures around to distract us from these feelings and insights, even to tell us to "be realistic" and "get back to the real world." In addition, life gives us plenty of clues, but for most of us only clues. It's real work to make sense of the clues, and just when we think we've got it figured out, the clues keep on coming. Discovering purpose is not an event, it's a lifelong process. The essential discipline of life and leadership is to continually pursue an understanding of our personal purpose and its meaning for the direction of our lives.

There is another complication. All of this takes courage. Just as creative tension brings with it an opportunity to react to anxiety, the pursuit of purpose can bring us face to face with our greatest fears. It's not unusual to discover what really matters to us and be terrified. As the poet David Whyte put it in his poem, *Out On The Ocean*:

> ### And the spark behind fear
>
> ### recognized as life leaps into flame
>
> ### always this energy smolders inside
>
> ### when it remains unlit the body fills with dense smoke.

The spark is often behind fear. The love and passion we would like to discover when we encounter our purpose are accompanied by all kinds of fears related to the change required of our lives if we pursue a new direction, our perceived inadequacy to pursue it, the possibility of failure, or the conflicts we see with what others expect of us or what we have learned to expect of ourselves. Once again, we have the opportunity to move toward the problem-reacting stance in order to reduce these unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings. If we let go of purpose in this situation, we are left in a trap of our own devising—one in which we trade who we are for temporary safety––"and the body fills with dense smoke." This is spiritual death.

The soul knows where it wants to go, and it will not accept a compromise. Leadership requires the discipline to let go and to be led by our higher purpose. It is essentially a spiritual discipline. I believe that this is the only way to achieve the staying power required to transform ourselves and our organizations—in spite of political risks, self-doubt, fear, and possible failure. Only commitment to a deep longing can sustain us, because it matters enough. Unless the results we are pursuing are connected with something deep within us, creative tension is too easily compromised and we find ourselves back where we started.

The leader's task is not only to cultivate and sustain purpose and creative tension within herself or himself but also to cultivate and sustain these things for the whole organization. There is no safe or risk-free way to do that. There is no formula for success. But there is power in it—the power that lies at the source of genuine leadership.

Vision and Alignment

If purpose is the starting place for leadership, then vision is the leadership's primary contribution. Leadership is fundamentally the act of articulating and acting in pursuit of a vision that flows from our commitment to a higher purpose. Each of us has a unique and personal purpose that is seeking expression through our lives. Vision is a picture of how we want to actualize that meaning in tangible ways. It is a way of perceiving the specific direction our spirit longs to go. To lead is to take our vision seriously. To lead is to be constantly discerning vision in the various circumstances in which we find ourselves, to embody that vision in every encounter (Block, 1987), to engage others is the search for common vision, and together to find concrete ways to translate that vision into action. Distilling vision in dialogue with others is another discipline at the heart of leadership. Without this discipline there is no leadership.

Vision, or rather "visioning" is very popular today. Unfortunately, because vision is one of those ideas that is both simple and deep, it is becoming the latest victim in a long list of management fads. It is the current flavor of the month. It is being engaged so superficially that its pay-off is low, and already we are starting to hear the chorus of complaints from management ranks, "We tried vision, it didn't help."

The literature on vision doesn't help a lot. Vision is defined as intangibly as "The expression of ultimate meaning and unique contribution" by Peter Block, and as tangibly as "specific enough that you would know it when you see it" by Robert Fritz. Such divergence leaves managers and consultants alike confused about what the work of developing organizational vision really is. Consequently, we have tended to see vision as closely related to what we already know how to do. We end up developing value statements or mission statements; or, we produce vision statements that are rewordings of our business plans but which do not engage us as passionate, creating individuals.

So what is vision and how is it different from mission, values, strategies, goals and objectives? A useful example to clarify the important difference between these comes from President Kennedy's State of the Union address. In that speech he called on the country to "… before the end of the decade, place a man [sic] on the moon and return him safely to Earth." Notice that the President did *not* say, "We will explore the heavens …"—a statement of direction or intent––but rather named the result he had in mind, in enough detail that everyone would know (as they did in July of 1969) that we had done it.

Vision is the linkage between mission and values on one end of a continuum, and strategy goals and objectives on the other end. In addition most descriptions of vision miss the fundamental connection between what is personally important to us—our personal purposes—and the detailed description of what we want to create. Kennedy expressed a vision that was specific enough for all to understand and share; lofty enough to engage people on behalf of what they valued most, whether that was national pride, engineering excellence, or aeronautical performance; and strategic enough to make a difference in international affairs, spin-off uses of technology, and national will. True vision is specific, strategic, lofty and communal.

Vision must be specific enough that you would know it if you saw it realized. "To go west …" is not a vision; "To reach San Francisco…" is much better; when you get there, you will know it. I first got on to the importance of specificity when I helped a sales group for a fortune 500 company develop a vision statement years ago. We developed the typical flowery statement that looked more like a philosophy/values statement than a business vision. The group was mildly pleased with the outcome after two days of work. A couple of weeks later I stopped into a meeting they were having. The first thing I noticed was the tangible sense of enthusiasm that was in the room. No one was sitting, they were excitedly talking about what they were going to pull off in the marketplace. On the flip chart was a list of ten bullets with the words "Our Vision" at the top. I was disappointed because the ten bullets did not fit my definition of vision at the time (which leaned toward "The expression of ultimate meaning and unique contribution"). But, I could not deny their enthusiasm. Two years later I interviewed these team members to evaluate the impact of the work we did together. One person put it most clearly, "Our vision was incredibly powerful. I still feel its pull." When I asked him which vision statement he was referring to he proceeded to list all ten bullets in order. He had only a vague recollection of the other statement we developed.

Vision is strategic, but it is not strategy. Strategy begins to chart the course of how to get from wherever you are to the vision. Vision is the capstone of strategy. It is a description of the business as we want it to exist at some point in the future. It sets a direction that will allow the organization to thrive. Vision is a response to current realities of the marketplace, but it describes a future that is not limited by the constraints of reality. Vision defines the organization's unique contribution to real needs, real markets, and real social and cultural imperatives.

Vision is also lofty. It captures our highest aspirations for our lives and work (Kiefer and Stroh, 1984). It is unashamedly spiritual and fundamentally imaginative. A lofty vision grabs us at a deeper level than does the promise of profit, or market share. While a vision will often include these, by lofty I mean that it appeals to our values, higher aspirations and personal purposes. In this way, a lofty vision also makes the pursuit meaningful and worthwhile.

As you can tell, I believe that leadership is hard work. Vision must be lofty enough that the results we create really matter to us. A specific, strategic, lofty vision of results is the product of a creative process of its own, one that integrates the personal expression of our purpose and that of others with the larger world: the contexts in which we live and work. Leaders create this vision by describing a set of results that people can work toward with a sense of lofty purpose, in a way that achieves practical, and strategic personal and organizational benefits.

So then what is the leader's role? First, to be a person of vision. Vision is the essence of leadership. To see the leader is to see the vision; he or she cares about it, embodies it, becomes it, and is taken with it—cannot *not* be fully involved with it. Pursuing the vision brings such a person passion, meaning, and joy. And by acting on the vision, the leader becomes a catalyst around which the vision takes shape and becomes real and around which others can rally (Senge, 1990).

The second role of leadership is to facilitate a dialogue aimed at building alignment around common vision (Kiefer and Stroh, 1984). This is the communal aspect of vision. The alignment of others around our vision is essential if our organizations are to develop. Some advise leaders to create the vision and then get others to enroll or sign up. But this is patriarchal and counterproductive: no power comes from enrolling in someone else's vision. Instead, by expressing his or her vision, the leader causes others to reflect on what they stand for. It's very difficult to remain neutral in the presence of strong leadership. When we encounter it, we are challenged to examine or evaluate our own interests and our own stance. Alignment happens when other people discover that they too can realize their purpose by working with the leader in the interest of a common vision.

When the leader embodies the vision, stimulates reflection by others, and engages in dialogue about commonalties of purpose, he or she creates an opportunity for the true purpose and vision of the organization to rise to the surface. True alignment comes about as the dialogue continues. Leaders must initiate and sustain this dialogue, willing to influence and be influenced. The result of the ongoing dialogue is an emerging consensus about current reality together with a vision that expresses the highest aspirations of the group—one that excites, humbles, and fulfills its members and contributes to organizational success.

The discipline of leadership is to create a purpose-connected vision of results and to be that vision; to encourage others to do the same; and to distill and refine a common sense of purpose and results through honest dialogue. The resulting organizational vision taps the spiritual power of purpose and brings that generative force to bear on the creation of meaningful personal and organizational results.

Choice

Vision remains impotent until there is commitment. Commitment is the bridge between our vision and its future realization. The words of W.H. Murray could not be clearer on this subject:

> *Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it,/Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."*

Imagine what would have happened if Kennedy had said, "Let's work on some of these technologies, and if they work well and if we can afford it when the time comes, then maybe we'll think about making a commitment to go to the moon." No doubt, we never would have made it. Not because the technical challenges would have been any different, but because this type of commitment has never resulted in great achievement.

Another essential discipline of leadership is committing yourself before you know *how* you will do what you say you *will* do, before it feels perfectly safe to make the commitment, and before you know with certainty that it is even possible. I use the word "choice" for this kind of commitment. To choose a result is to commit yourself to it, in spite of all the reasons why that choice may not seem feasible or risk free. Making the choice is the fundamental act; everything else follows from that.

Without choice there is no creative tension. Creative tension is established by a full and complete choice for the vision (Fritz, 1989). While this by no means guarantees success, it does significantly increase the chances that what you choose will come into being. There is nothing magic about this. As long as you hedge in your commitment to a result, you will be distracted from acting deliberately toward it. Or, because your focus on the result is incomplete, you will miss opportunities to act in its interest. And you will compromise the creative tension that is your best ally in pursuing it.

Choosing is hard because it demands more of us than mere agreement or wishful thinking. I often hear people talking about results they want, wish would happen, and/or agree are needed. I stop and ask them to choose the result by saying the words, "I choose…" and completing the sentence with the result they just mentioned. Often the words get stuck in their throat. They start to tell me why they can't choose it. They talk about the overwhelming obstacles, about how they are not sure they are ready to do what it takes to make the result happen, about the impact that pursuing that choice would have on others. Sometimes, if they are really honest, they talk about their fear, their sense of inadequacy, or their despair that they could ever create it. It reminds me of when I used to stand for hours on the 10-foot high diving board trying to decide if I was really committed to jumping. Choice is a leap. It means accepting in one moment all the risk that pursuing the choice entails. It means letting go of the need to know how and trusting that a creative how will be discovered along the way. Most of us are not used to this type of full commitment of the will. And there is a vast difference between 95% and 100% commitment. Or, as someone has said in a different context, the last five yards are the hardest.

The excuses most of us offer for why we can't have what we want usually center on external obstacles such as the lack of time, money, and adequate support from others. I call these excuses because they are true for all of us. Unless we were born with a silver spoon in our mouth, none of us has enough time, money, and support. In addition, there are plenty of people and organizations with equally limited resources that have already achieved the results we claim are not possible for us. The focus on these obstacles is a good clue that we are stuck in the problem-reacting cycle.

For the most part, the focus on external obstacles is a convenient way to avoid the deeper internal issues that have us stuck. Over the years I have compiled a list of the deeper issues that typically block us from making a choice. They are as follows:

- We may be under the impression that we have to know how to achieve it—or be assured that it's possible—before we can commit to it.

- We may be out of touch with what we really want. The choice may confront us with the necessity of change. Often it is easier to deny what we want and how much we want it than face the vulnerability of change. If we really admitted to ourselves that we want this result, we would have to change.

- We may believe that choosing one result means foregoing another desirable result; we think we have mutually exclusive wants. Perhaps we see the situation from an *either/or* perspective instead of a *both/and* one; or we may not know how to create both results at the same time and believe it is not possible to do so (a variation on the first bullet).

- Perhaps we don't really want the result, or its priority among other results is relatively low.

- Perhaps, for us, the result is a "should." It's something we feel we have to create in order to be OK; or it's not OK not to want it. In this case we do not want the result for its own sake, but as a prop for our fragile sense of identity and safety. One part of us knows we do not really want it, another part feels like it needs it to survive. Full commitment is difficult when we are conflicted in this way.

- We may have core beliefs about others or ourselves that conflict with pursuing a given result. In this case achieving or failing to achieve the result puts in jeopardy one or more of our identity and safety strategies. We risk failure, imperfection, loss of approval, etc.

There is something interesting about these reasons. None of them are a part of current reality outside of ourselves. The most significant obstacles between what we want and us are internal. External obstacles are easier to navigate around. They are simply a matter of a well-executed strategy. Internal obstacles, like the kind listed above, demand introspection, discernment, and self-discovery. This is the discipline of choosing. And it is much more difficult and easily avoided than staying ambivalent and uncommitted.

When choosing, many people experience a powerful dose of anxiety, the source of which is their internal structure of beliefs about what's possible for them, about how the world works, and/or what they need to be in order to be safe and worthwhile. These beliefs form the most significant obstacles to our creating what we want. These beliefs do not need to be eliminated prior to choosing (in fact, as we will see later, they cannot be eliminated), nor do the inner conflicts created by the beliefs need to be resolved before making the choice. It is enough to know that we want it. If we want it we can choose it even though these contradictory beliefs are creating anxiety. What we do with this anxiety and inner conflict is the next leadership discipline.

Another reason for our anxiety is a lack of faith. Choice is a leap. It demands faith. Those who are practiced in this discipline have also developed a faith in forces beyond our own efforts. As the quote at the beginning of this section implies, the universe is providential. When we fully commit ourselves, larger forces are there to work with us. This is especially true if the choices we make are aligned with our higher purpose. The outcome-creating orientation has the quality of magic about it for precisely this reason. As Rilke says in his poem, *A Man Watching*: "What we fight against is so small/what fights with us is so great." Paraphrasing Joseph Campbell in his tape series with Bill Moyers, *Follow your Bliss*: "When you are following someone else's purpose all the doors remain closed, but when you commit yourself to your own true purpose the doors always open." If we are not used to the discipline of choice we may not understand this and our choices become more anxiety ridden than they need to be. Leaders, however, count on this type of support.

Leaders have learned the discipline of choice. They are able to envision results and commit themselves to them, even in the face of strong anxieties about the situation. They ask themselves, "If I knew I could not fail, would I pursue this?" And if the answer is "yes," they make the choice—in full knowledge that they may fail, but also knowing that the best preventive for failure is full commitment. They also study their anxieties for clues about their internal structure of beliefs, and they find ways to work with these beliefs in order to improve the odds that what they have chosen, they can indeed create.

Working with Inner Obstacles

Discovering personal purpose, clarifying purpose into a vision of desired results, and choosing those results come what may, are the disciplines that establish creative tension—these are the leadership disciplines we have explored so far. On the surface, these may seem self-evident. Why then is leadership so uncommon? Two reasons. First, the disciplines mentioned already are either not practiced or practiced only superficially. Second, the more painful work of facing inner obstacles—inquiring deeply into the source of our self-limitation and unconscious behavior that does not support what we have chosen—is systematically avoided. We try to find a convenient way to, "go for those gold coins." We look for superficial fixes, refusing to "slip beneath the still surface on the well of grief," wishing for a less disturbing path. As Peter Block, a mentor of mine, once said to me, "Bob, you want to ascend without scars."

In the problem-reacting stance, our actions are driven by our anxiety and fear of loss. Such reaction seldom leads to where we really want to go. Instead, we temporarily reduce our anxiety by running away from the real problem. Making ourselves feel safe and comfortable takes priority over being true to ourselves and acting on our vision. For many this reactive strategy is not conscious—and, to the extent that it is unconscious, we are stuck in an ever-repeating cycle of anxiety, reaction, and continuous problem solving. The only way out is through. Or as the Greeks said, "Know thyself."

Throughout this paper, I have briefly mentioned that each of us has "maps of identity." We are all mapmakers. We all make conclusions from our experience about the nature of reality and the nature of ourselves. Many of these conclusions were made when we were young and, therefore, inexperienced mapmakers. In fact, our maps are littered with errors. Most of the errors take the form of equating our self-worth and security with acquiring something external to ourselves, such as, the approval of others, recognition, love, perfection, being right, fitting in, getting ahead, being successful, etc. These equations (e.g., worth = approval) create a compulsive need to always have whatever worth and safety equate to. I call these equations *belief structures*. Other beliefs that cause us problems are conclusions we have made that place limits on what we are capable of or what is possible for us (e.g., I can't speak well in front of others). We also form beliefs about others and the nature of reality (e.g., It is a hostile world where everyone is out for themselves). Taken altogether these belief structures make up a map of reality that we use to navigate our lives.

The beliefs we hold are often not conscious. We made them a long time ago and have been living by them for so long that they seem true for us. The work of the cognitive psychologists, however—especially Albert Ellis and David Burns—tells us that these maps are frequently not as reliable as they seem to us. As psychiatrist M. Scott Peck has said, "Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are,

and if we have decided where we want to go, we will generally know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we generally will be lost." The feeling of being lost is frequently reported by people beginning to choose important results for their lives and work.

When we establish creative tension we frequently feel another kind of "tension." This "tension" is fear in one of its many forms: anxiety, doubt, despair, anger, helplessness, urgency, etc. Our maps of reality and identity produce this anxiety. When discovering, choosing, and/or taking the actions (required to pursue what we most want) conflict with our maps of reality and identity, we experience fear in one of its many forms. If we then react to reduce anxiety and stay safe, our maps are defining our future rather than our conscious choice. Because most of us have serious flaws in our map, letting our map be the guide is a sure way of getting lost. Our lives become determined by past choices and conclusions, not by the future we want.

Our most powerful belief structures are those connected with our definitions of safety and identity. These beliefs relate achieving something (X) or being a certain way (Y) to our being able to survive or remain worthy of existence. Therefore, anything that risks the loss of X, or failure to be Y, is terrifying. This terror is often unconscious (or we may experience it as stress, anxiety, fear, anger, etc.), but it influences our behavior none-the-less. This is "the spark behind fear" mentioned earlier. A fragile new choice has little power when one of these beliefs blocks us from acting on or even making the choice. When this terror and the belief structures connected to them remain unconscious, they manage us. This is the essence of the problem-reacting structure.

The beliefs that make up many of our maps do not support the organizational transition from patriarchy to partnership described earlier. In fact, many of the most common beliefs are patriarchal in nature and therefore the psychological genesis of patriarchy. Two of the most important for our study of leadership are belief structures having to do with dependency and control.

In dependency, we move toward (Horney, 1945) others in a way that ties us to their approval and subjects us to their control. Dependency is crippling because it undermines our power—and it tends to do so beneath our awareness. We rationalize our dependency by saying that we have to "go along to get along" or by pointing out that "this is just how things get done around here." All these are excuses for cautiously managing what we do and say in order to stay safe and win or maintain the approval of others (Block, 1987). Our need for approval stems from a belief that our self-worth and the approval of others are somehow related. The more we want the approval of others, the more our self-worth is on the line in confrontational situations, and the more likely we are to act in the interest of safety rather than in the interest of our vision.

Control means moving against (Horney, 1945) others in order to dominate them, be better than them, and/or excel beyond them. It is similar to dependency in that it is a strategy for establishing and maintaining identity and safety. It differs from dependency only in direction. When we act dependently, we submit ourselves to the expectations of others. When controlling we require others to submit to our expectation and/or we are trying to triumph over them in some way. In a structure of control, the greatest fear is of being out of control or failing to measure up, so we micro-manage, delegate but retain all the authority, intimidate as a means of influence, win only if someone else loses, insist on having the answers and knowing the right way, and on and on. We rationalize our behavior with a repertoire of stories about how things really do get out of control. We allow our actions to be driven by a belief that says our self-worth depends upon being better than others and on controlling people and situations. Our self-worth is on the line if we fail to be on top and in control. The more we need this kind of control, the less likely we are to act in the interest of our vision. Instead, we spend all of our energies reacting to the risk of losing control—activity that can leave no energy for anything else.

We learned these lessons as children, looking up for nurturance and protection, when we lived in a world of giants. We legitimately depended on these big and powerful people for our safety and self esteem. In response to the helplessness and vulnerability we felt, we adopted a strategy of either control or dependency. And most of us have smoothly but unconsciously transferred these strategies into our organizational lives. Bosses become surrogate parents (Block, 1987), subordinates become the children, and we continue acting out the dependent and/or controlling strategies we designed into our maps when we were young. Our historically patriarchal organizations link these two sets of behaviors, as controlling managers and dependent employees engage in their mutually reinforcing dance—neither able to lead or even step out of the problem-reacting orientation.

It may seem unrealistic, or even offensive, to observe that many successful managers and employees are unconsciously acting on strategies they adopted as children to establish a sense of safety and self-worth. Yet, I believe it is true. This is the problem-reacting orientation at work in the work place. When I observe and experience the behaviors I listed early in this paper, and when I find so many people willing to admit that these behaviors are common, my conviction that these belief structures is an underlying cause grows stronger.

In addition, because these belief structures are unconscious, we frequently find ourselves espousing one thing as our beliefs drive a contradictory set of behaviors. And everybody sees this but us. The difference between our "walk" and our "talk" is that our unconscious self drives the former while our conscious mind drives the latter. If I remain unaware of my belief structure, then my beliefs manage me. Only when I expose and examine these beliefs do I have the opportunity to manage them.

How do we know what our belief structures are like? The simplest way is to look at our lives and our results (Allen, 1910). Because our life's experience tends to be consistent with how we think, our belief structure is responsible for the results we are in fact getting (Allen, 1910). If we find ourselves spending too much time in the problem-reacting life stance, then the source of that behavior is to be found in our belief structure. If we find ourselves facing the same problems over and over in your life, our belief structure is responsible. If we find our own dependent or controlling behavior undermining an organizational change process we believe in, our maps are running the show. If we find our life dissatisfying and think we're in the wrong place, doing the wrong thing, our belief structure is the limitation. In spite of all I said earlier about the power of choice, it remains true that conscious choice is impotent unless our unconscious self is aligned with our choices. Our sub-conscious runs the show, or as James Allen says in *As a Man Thinketh*, "We do not get what we choose, we get what we are."

The art of working with our unconscious belief structures is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, that there are many ways to identify and over time transform these structures. This is the deeper work of personal transformation and part of the path to genuine organizational transformation. This inner work is what our spiritual traditions have called dying to self. The old self, composed of its faulty assumptions and corresponding compulsions, must die in order for the true self to be reborn. This is the hero's/heroine's journey referred to in the mythology of every culture. Engaging such a transformation requires the discipline to explore this previously unknown territory. I like what Wendell Berry has said in a related context:

> *Always in the big woods when you leave familiar ground and step off alone into a new place there will be, along with the feelings*

> *of curiosity and excitement, a little nagging of dread. It is ancient fear of the unknown and it is your first bond with the wilderness you are going into. What you are doing is exploring.*

This exploration—the discovery and reframing of beliefs that prevent you from creating what matters to you most—is perhaps the most challenging and rare of all the disciplines of leadership. And, therefore, it is the most essential.

Balancing Reason and Intuition

Our Western style of rationality has brought us a long way. When we look around at the state of the world, we see brilliant technological solutions to problems of communication, engineering, transportation, and more. But we also see mounting environmental and social problems—some of which seem, mysteriously, to be connected somehow with our technological successes. I think it's fair to say that our logical, structured ways of thinking have brought us mixed blessings.

It's not that we have no experience with more intuitive ways of thinking. Even Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." And many innovators, from Thomas Edison to Stephen Jobs, have acknowledged the contribution of a hunch, a sixth sense, to coming up with something new. My point is, rather, that in our organizations in particular, we have become more and more resistant to paying attention to sources of information outside of our linear rationality. The typical management team meeting has no place for hunches; instead it's "What do the numbers tell us to do?"

I believe that leadership requires us to balance what the numbers say with other sources of information and guidance, sources that are less linear, more intuitive, and more personal. Much of what I have suggested about leadership in this article is highly rational, but not in the linear, logical way that we are most used to. The leader's sense of personal purpose does not come from the domain of logic; it comes from the domain of passion and person-hood. A vision of results that matters is created as much by the non-rational, unconscious mind as by the cerebral cortex. (I believe that our super-rationality is in part what makes it hard to envision results that—at the moment—we don't know how to create.) Finding leverage points in complex systems cannot be done by traditional analytical techniques (Senge, 1990). According to Jerome Wiesner, "Some problems are just too complicated for rational, logical solutions. They admit of insights, not answers."

We tend to ignore our intuition because our cultural bias tells us to. In order to lead effectively, we need access to every kind of information available to us. We need access to forms of perception beyond the bounds of our usual organizational rationality. We need to see relationships and interconnections that are invisible to linear, logical methods. The discipline of leadership is to recognize that intuition is real, that we all have it, that it can be developed through practice, and that—in the words of the philosopher Schopenhauer—"There is in us something wiser than our head."

ACTION LEADERSHIP DISCIPLINES

Systems Thinking and Design

We have said that leadership is characterized by the articulation of vision, and by adopting an empowered, outcome-creating life stance that allows the leader to stand for the vision in every encounter and be an empowering influence. The leader is also the catalyst for structural change. New vision cannot be achieved through the structures that manifested the past order. In the presence of a new and compelling vision, organizational structures must evolve, because when structural change is ignored, visions fail. They fail because structural forces are more powerful than individual commitment. Only when leaders have the courage to meet the challenge of structural change, do they have a chance of seeing their vision become reality.

> *In our experience, the reason why so many experiments in organizational change fail is that the leaders have failed to take into account the strong undertow of cultural [structural] forces. Leaders who fail to take their social architecture into account and yet try to change their organizations resemble nothing so much as Canute, the legendary Danish monarch who stood on the beach and commanded the waves to stand still as proof of his power.*

(Bennis, 1985)

Throughout the preceding discussion, you may have noticed a constant theme: the structures of both our minds and our organizations are critical to their performance. I have said that there are two contrasting life stances, and I have described these as structures of feedback and interdependence that drive our behavior. I have discussed the power of creative tension, the result of a common physical structure that I (and especially Robert Fritz) have "translated" into the area of personal and organizational performance. I have tried to make the case for the influence of our belief structures on behavior, decision making and on the results we create both personally and organizationally.

Common to these arguments is the idea that underlying structure determines performance (Senge, 1990). It follows that genuine change must take place at the structural level. Structures are not changed by attempting to "fix" the results that these structures lead to. Or, to use another metaphor, the underlying condition is not changed by attempting to cure its symptoms. Only changes to the underlying condition or structure can lead in the long run to different outcomes, "symptoms," or behaviors. For these reasons, I believe that the role of leadership is to design and redesign the underlying structures of our organizations and of ourselves.

The concept of structure, as we are using it, is much broader than traditionally defined. Structure is every mechanism that in some way channels individual energy into collective results (Kiefer and Stroh, 1984). It includes explicit mechanisms like organization charts, job descriptions, policies and

procedures, building/office layout, etc. It includes less tangible things such as strategies, goals and objectives. In addition, we include in the concept of structure intangible/invisible components such as vision, values, beliefs, conscious or unconscious operating assumptions, norms, etc. All of these elements, when taken together, form a complex interrelated web of forces that have a powerful influence on how people act and the pattern of system performance. In fact, structure is the primary determinant of performance.

The fields of Open Systems Theory and Systems Dynamics Theory have contributed much to the understanding of systems as a complex set of interrelated forces. An in-depth summary of the learning's about systems and their redesign is beyond the scope of this paper. However, as one of the essential disciplines of leadership, it offers several important lessons worth mentioning here. First, leaders must design and redesign their organizations (and their consciousness) rather than trying to "fix" them into perfection. In the problem-reacting life stance we try to eliminate problem after problem, hoping against hope that when we are done, we will be left with what we really want. This is not design; it is demolition. It is the approach of the symptomatic quick fix. In spite of our addiction to it, we must learn that it simply does not work. Our tendency to react to problems, combined with our strong cultural predisposition to linear thinking (everything has just one cause and only the most noticeable, immediate effects), keeps us stuck in our reactiveness—and ironically, by distracting us from the underlying causative structures, continues to make things worse. It is the predominate orientation of modern Western personal and organizational life. The discipline of leadership is to find another way.

A second lesson of systems thinking is that all complex systems—whether they are organizational systems or our systems of thought—are profoundly resistant to change, not because there is something wrong with the people in them or the people who hold them, but because that's what systems do. Organizational systems seem to have a life of their own. That is, they act as any living organism does, they seek homeostasis or equilibrium when change is introduced (Senge, 1990). This tendency to resist change helps to ensure the survival of the system, it also makes them very difficult to change. This resistance cannot in the long run be overcome by any amount of increased motivation or skills enhancement. What can change systems is leveraged action: strategically focused action aimed at particular points of leverage that may be far removed in time and space from the symptoms that infuriate us at the moment. Finding leverage points requires us to know how to see and explore the dynamic system-ness of our current reality. This means that when we establish creative tension, we see the systemic structure of current reality, not just symptoms and problems. To do this we need to resist reacting to the hot or loud symptoms closest at hand; to focus attention on the redesigned system we choose to create; and to live with the anxiety of not responding to all the problems as we search for leverage.

If new organizational structures (or personal belief structures) are necessary and desirable, then systems thinking is the software that will allow us to create them. It is the mental framework that supports high leverage system redesign.

A primary role of leadership in operationalizing the vision is as an architect of structure. An architect does not do the construction, he/she guides the process. This means that senior leaders ensure that processes are in place so that the organization learns to think systemically and to redesign itself over time. It does not mean that senior leaders do the redesign and then require others to adapt to new roles and processes. The real challenge is to develop a change strategy that gets broad based involvement in the ongoing renewal of the system. In addition, the deeper work of leadership development needs to go on side by side with system redesign. When leadership

development is integrated into a well-conceived strategy for wholesale involvement in systems redesign, visions become reality. People grow and translate that growth directly into organizational improvement.

Most leaders do not see their primary role as that of conceptualizing change strategies so that structures evolve allowing the vision to flourish naturally. They see their role as either implementing daily operations, or facilitating others to implement. While these functions are important, they are managerial in nature, meaning they contribute to maintaining or marginally improving current performance. New vision requires a new direction or a significant shift in the performance of the whole system. A primary role of leadership (at every level in the organization, not just senior levels) when pursuing vision, is to help the organization discover new structures that alter the system so that people's efforts are naturally channeled toward manifesting that vision.

Innovative organizations today are successfully implementing new visions and achieving significant changes in system results (both in terms of the bottom-line and in terms of individual empowerment). They are doing this not by effecting minor modifications in the existing structure, but by revolutionizing structures. The emerging paradigm includes:

- Focusing people on the deeper values and higher aspiration that they have for their work

- De-emphasizing control rules and established procedure

- Opening the doors to meaningful participation at all levels

- Breaking down paternal/hierarchical barriers

- Moving decision-making authority down

- Work teams becoming responsible for managing themselves

- Empowering leadership in everyone

- Eliminating large centralized functional bureaucracies in favor of smaller autonomous interrelated units

- Enrolling people at all levels to radically redesign the work system

- Redesigning reward/compensation systems to encourage teamwork and creativity, etc.

These changes are more than window dressing or short-term programs. They completely alter the way managers manage and the way work gets done. It is designing this type of change that characterizes leadership as the architect of structure.

Achieving sustainable system change is very difficult, much harder than it seems. Consequently, it requires leadership of creativity, experimentation, perseverance, and courage if the system is ever going to manifest the full extent of the vision. This type of change will only happen when leaders at all levels take responsibility for implementing structural change. If we wait for change to be forthcoming from the top, it will be a long wait (Block, 1987). Consequently, the challenge before leaders today is to initiate change from the bottom-up. Leaders must look at their own area of influence as a bubble in which to create their vision (Block, 1987). The stance of the leader as the architect of structure is, "My role is to engage others in creating an organization of our own choosing in the midst of the larger system/culture, and thereby, create an example of what we want

the whole organization to emulate." (Block, 1987). The most powerful political tool for influencing the current culture is to demonstrate a model that works. In so doing, we advocate for structural change through the power of our example. Acting in such a way requires empowerment and real courage.

People may ignore your vision, or simply disagree with it, but when you begin to address the system, you must be prepared for conflict. This is because the underpinnings of any tangible organizational structure are an invisible structure of thought, belief, philosophy, or theology. Tangible structures simply mirror the thinking that gave birth to them. Changing tangible structures, therefore, almost always confronts the thought structures to which people currently adhere. This is why structural change is often so tenaciously resisted. It upsets the apple cart. Rollo May puts it this way:

> *Whenever there is a breakthrough of a significant idea... [it] will destroy what a lot of people believe is essential to the survival of their intellectual and spiritual world... As Picasso remarked, 'Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction.'*
>
> *The breakthrough carries with it also an element of anxiety. For it not only broke down my previous hypothesis, it shook my self-world relationship. At such a time I find myself having to seek a new foundation, the existence of which I as yet don't know. This is the source of the anxious feeling.*
>
> *(May, 1975)*

Structure change is both conflictual and ambiguous. No one has answers because systems are so complex. Moving forward with ambiguity, while at the same time challenging the cherished thinking that built the old order is conflictual. Such conflict, compassionately engaged in, is a sign of life. It is the process by which visions get tested and improved (or changed) and through which the old structures evolve and become new. The leader is at the forefront of the controversy and must be willing to be a controversial figure. The ambiguous and controversial nature of the change agent role brings the leader up against two additional life disciplines. In order to help us see leverage in the midst of complexity, the discipline of using intuition is essential. And, in the midst of threatening and controversial change, the discipline of authentic dialogue is a prerequisite to finding breakthroughs.

Authentic Dialogue and Courage

Leadership requires a bias for truth and integrity. A bias for truth is a radical openness to a new evolution in our current view. Without these, we might be forced to admit that Hitler, for example, was an empowered leader—after all, he had a vision and advocated structural change. On the

contrary, a bias for truth means a persistent search for higher, more noble visions of results, ever more consistent with what the world seems really to need from us. It also means the open admission that no one has a monopoly on truth, and the belief that our perception of things is only partially true, correct, right, or good. Leaders must simultaneously stand for what they know and be open to the evolution of their understanding.

The need to be open to a higher evolution in our thinking is relevant to the leadership function of structural change as well. Every structure has built-in limits. The World War I biplane was based on the very latest knowledge of aviation technology available at the time. Yet, now, looking back, we know that it was a rudimentary structure when compared to the modern airliner. In fact, our current air transportation system could not have been built within the structural limitation of the biplane. New, more elegant structures had to be developed. One of the great tragedies of our time is that our enthusiasm for discovering new scientific or technological structures has not been matched by the desire to design more effective and uplifting organizational structures. In fact, our organizational structures are still very much modeled after that of the Roman Empire. To be biased for truth is to work in the knowledge that our current thinking about the optimal structure is only partially correct and to be constantly in search of a higher way of thinking about organizational systems.

If our knowledge is incomplete, then enhancing our understanding can only be done in dialogue with others. Or, as M. Scott Peck has said: "The only way that we can be certain that our map of reality is valid is to expose it to the criticism and challenge of other map-makers." What if we discover that our view differs from that of other mapmakers? Then we are faced with a choice between manipulation, which Peter Block defines as finding cautious indirect ways of making sure our view prevails, and authenticity, which to me means engaging in honest dialogue in order to enhance my understanding and the understanding of others, even at the expense of my beginning position.

Manipulation—the attempt to control or influence in hidden ways—is the political norm in organizational life (Block, 1987). To have a vision and pursue it, is to be political. Politics is the process of advocating for what we want. Vision is the content about which we are political (Block, 1987). We cannot lead without being political. We are political in every encounter, by what we say or choose not to say, how we say it, and by the strategies and tactics we use to have influence. The choice we face in being political is the choice between manipulation and integrity. It is our bias that the effective leader is characterized by a bias for integrity and that manipulation ultimately undermines the health of the organization.

This may seem like a personal choice. I maintain that it is a choice for the organization as well. There is much written and spoken about organizational culture, how to deal with it and how to change it. Much of this material discusses culture as if it is somehow separate from the individuals who make up the organization. In fact, it is the daily behavior of all these individuals that creates and recreates the culture continuously. If I choose manipulation in an organizational setting, then I create a piece of the culture in that moment—a culture characterized by manipulation (Block, 1987). If others do the same, then we co-create the culture we complain about (or perhaps hire an external consultant to fix). The choice between manipulation and authenticity in our daily dialogue with the organization determines the culture, which in turn conditions our subsequent behavior—and might lead us eventually to say something like, "Well, I prefer honest communication, but, you know, the culture around here doesn't support it." By engaging in manipulation, we create and maintain a culture of subtle dishonesty, power plays, withholding information, indirectness, isolation, and the erosion of trust and cooperation.

The other problem with manipulation is that it prevents the organization from being oriented toward truth. When organizations fail to be oriented toward the truth, they become unethical, unjust, and/or poor corporate citizens. It is impossible for an organization to engage in the honest dialogue required to continually evolve a more noble vision or more effective structures, if the political norm is manipulation. "You can't get there from here." While manipulation may seem at times as innocent as a white lie, it is one of the sources of systemic evil and injustice. Organizations will never evolve toward more truthful thinking or stand for justice if the people within them cannot have truthful conversations.

Authenticity has its own power. We all know the impact on a meeting when someone stops pretending and simply speaks the truth. This is spiritual power. When we act authentically we are most ourselves. We bring the full power of our soul into the room. While manipulation chips away at our integrity, authenticity allows us to stay whole. We also have the experience of participating in a higher truth that empowers everything. Antonio Machado writes in an untitled poem:

It's possible that while asleep the hand

that sows the seeds of the stars

started the ancient music going again

Like a note form the great harp—

and the frail wave came to our lips

as one or two honest words.

This is what Gandhi called soul force. It is a higher form of politics. While it almost always feels risky, it is where our true power lies.

As we choose between manipulation and authenticity, another culture-building choice confronts us: the choice between discussion and dialogue. As Peter Senge has described it, discussion comes from the same root as percussion, and can be taken to mean throwing our ideas at each other, hoping to score points and win the day. This too is normative political process in most organizations. Dialogue, in contrast, means—as Stephen Covey has expressed it—seeking first to understand, then to be understood. To engage in dialogue requires us to believe that we may have something to learn. If we do have something to learn, then we must balance our use of advocacy— promoting views that we may feel strongly about—with our use of inquiry—committed exploration of what others believe.

To do this, especially in connection with issues we care deeply about, requires both compassion and courage. If we want to design and build an organization with a culture that supports our values, then we must act out these values in every encounter (Block, 1987). This frequently means telling

the truth; that is, saying what we really think even though it may result in disapproval or the loss of things related to our self-interest or even to our self-esteem. I believe we almost always know what we should say; we do not say it because of a lack of courage.

What stifles courage? Our dependency, and the belief structures that—as I have described—underlie it. Our need for approval and our confusion about where our self-worth and safety really lie prevent us from engaging in the kind of authentic dialogue that would re-create our culture as we want it to be. It takes courage to act in the interest of our vision in the face of these beliefs; but I believe it can be done and is done every day. M. Scott Peck once said in a lecture, "Courage is not the absence of fear—that's brain damage. Courage is the willingness to act in spite of fear."

We all tend to believe that if we speak out, we will "get shot" (Block, 1987). And certainly people do get shot in organizational life. Studies have clearly shown, however, that people more often are shot for the way they stand up rather than for the content of their speech. They get shot for arrogance, hostility, blaming, undermining, denying responsibility, or attacking people rather than issues (Hornstein, 1986). I think of these behaviors as the dark side of courage—courage unrestrained by compassion. Compassion means supporting others' positions as reasonable and valid for them, understanding others' harsh reality, owning up to our own contribution to the existing problems (Block, 1987), and authentically inquiring in order to understand others' views on a deep level.

The art of leadership is to act out of courage, but to do so in a compassionate way. I agree with Donald Wolfe:

> *It takes a special kind of courage to stay in tune with your feelings when those feelings conflict and seem to work against you. It takes courage to speak the truth in many situations, especially when that truth is unpopular and may bring down the wrath of others... And it takes courage to live fully by one's beliefs and values—to persist in actions that run the risk of failure or the risk of hostility and rejection from others.*

Building Aligned Learning Communities

Our organizations are too complex to figure out ourselves. The disciplines of leadership I have described are largely personal; yet they cannot be successfully learned or practiced in isolation. We need other people with whom we can share our search for purpose and meaning. Much of our vision of important results necessarily involves others; their support may be absolutely essential. The act of choosing results to create is much more powerful if shared; in fact it must be a shared choice if the results are to be shared as well. The inner obstacles we face are—much to our surprise—very familiar to those around us and can be worked on together. The systems we are trying to lead and change are beyond us. Only the joined insights, analysis, and intuition of people in groups have a chance of discovering the most promising points of leveraged action.

Purpose, vision, and commitment must be shared to be powerful. Imagine a group of managers or employees who are sharing these things among themselves. Imagine a group of leaders learning together about their shared purpose, the common vision they have for their lives and their organization, and the myriad ways that their inner obstacles interfere. Such a group I would call a leadership learning community.

Look around the typical organization and watch how managers behave around each other. I think it's fair to say that in our organizations the most common forms of intra-group behavior are turf-protection, one-upmanship, power plays, avoidance, caution, and manipulation. We learn to behave this way early in our organizational lives, and we internalize the necessity of this kind of political action. (In fact, it's given politics a bad name.) We develop a belief system based on organizational survival-of-the-fittest. We can't imagine that organizational life could be any other way. As one manager said after a workshop on the these themes, "Its just not possible to take this kind of beauty into our work place."

On the contrary, I believe that if leadership is to become more common, we need to commit ourselves to develop and sustain leadership-learning communities—groups of managers characterized by the shared practice of the disciplines I have described. We need leaders for whom positive political behavior—of the type I have advocated under the name "authentic dialogue"—replaces the negative politics we are used to.

SPIRITUALITY AND PURPOSE

In this paper I have tried to describe the path toward leadership as I see it—an "uncommon-sense" approach that is neither simple nor easy. I'd like to close by talking about why I think the pursuit of leadership matters.

Never has the world more required leadership. In the past leadership arose in response to a crisis or an attack from an outside enemy, but today there is no outside enemy or crisis on the horizon. In addition, the challenges that face us today point to fundamental flaws in the foundations of our basic world order. Consequently, the solutions to our current problems will not come from the thinking that created them. What's required is uncommon leadership. A leadership built on spiritual purpose, leadership with vision that arises from a deeply systemic view of the world, leadership willing to face our individual and collective woundedness, and a leadership willing to act authentically and courageously in community with others to build a new future.

I believe that empowering ourselves as leaders, has consequences and goals beyond improving organizational effectiveness. Empowerment is intimately connected to the transformation of the world and its current problems. Frederic Hudson put it this way:

> *Adult empowerment in America today requires much more than psychotherapy, self-help, adult education, and human resource development... We are being challenged by a new frontier so vast that it spreads from our souls to the far reaches of the planet—*

and beyond. We need to extend the dream that we call American into the very worldwide forces that have kept us scared and powerless... This challenge requires a global consciousness, a reverence for one environment shared by all, the presence of new forms of capitalistic cooperativeness, new solutions to glaring economic inequities, and experimentation with international teams and alliances. American renewal requires a deep commitment to pluralism, diversity, and new opportunities for social contribution from women and men, the young and old. The external challenge is to release an American dream capable of inspiring new hope for people, organizations, society, and nations beyond our own. Any social agenda that falls short of this vision will fall into the hands of our chronic cynicism and navel-gazing... The new dream is anchored in personal empowerment and social determination. It is an inward-out vision.

The current worldwide struggle to transform the workplace, to redistribute political power, and to change the patriarchal relationship between people and the organization, is in my opinion an evolutionary process of historic proportions. This time in history will be remembered as a time when social transformation was catalyzed by personal and organizational empowerment. If we can somehow learn to broaden the base of people taking responsibility for organizational transformation, perhaps we can learn some of what it will take to change larger systems. I see leadership development within our economic institutions as a social imperative. We must develop leadership to improve the organization, but in so doing we develop leadership so needed by our world. This will only happen if we deepen our approach to leadership development.

A deeper approach to leadership and empowerment must be built on the spiritual principle that each of us has a unique purpose to fulfill. That purpose has its source in a Higher will, our own uniqueness, and the needs of the world. We have a contribution to make that is solely ours to make. Our task in life is to move toward an ever more complete expression of that purpose. Leadership is fundamentally the act of articulating and acting in pursuit of a vision that flows from our commitment to a higher purpose. Our vision, however, is not born through self-discovery alone, but through our dialogue with the culture around us. Vision is a response to the uniqueness of our own soul seeking a creative response to a world struggling and so in need. Vision is the culmination of a life long discipline of dialogue with a higher power, with our selves, and with the culture in need.

The best glimpse we have of our purpose is our vision of the results we want to create. What we want most tells us what we're here for. According to Thomas Szasz, "People often say that this or that person has not yet found himself. But the self is not something one finds, it is something one creates." In pursuing our vision, we can discover our purpose and create our true selves. To lead is to take our vision seriously. To lead is to be constantly discerning vision in the various circumstances in which we find ourselves, it is to personally embody that vision in every encounter, and to find concrete ways to translate it into action.