

An Invitation to Lead with Grace and Dignity

Leadership is a sacred calling and a great responsibility. The current world is challenging each of us to lead with greater consciousness for our fellow employees and for society at large. You don't have to be a leadership guru to figure this out. Simply look at the state of a number of larger public and private corporations. There is a desperateness for inspiration and for the creation of a culture that truly honors difference. There is the need for a place that promotes connection and calls for courageous leaders to challenge complacency and to act with integrity.

Embrace the potential to realize a new kind of power in your leadership by leading with grace and dignity...always. In this paper, we'll look at four key elements to assist you in doing this:

1. Becoming more self-aware, including emotional awareness;
2. Creating inspiring relationships that are honoring;
3. Staying real during the tough times—with grace;
4. Being truly courageous while creating your leadership legacy.

As you read this paper, you will have the opportunity to look at your current state of being, and then embark on shifting from your status quo. You will take away a renewed appreciation that within you is the capacity to lead even more powerfully than you do already. We are going to look at “getting real”: getting real with yourself, getting more connected to your emotions, noticing your impact on others (and checking to see if it matches your intent) and consciously choosing to lead authentically from who you really are...no matter what.

A Better Way

There *is* a better way. And guess what? It starts with you. There will always be great challenges, and you always have choices about how you will lead. As a leader, you hold it all: the formation of organizational culture, the inspiration of people, the outcomes of business, and finally, the commitments to multiple stakeholders—a tall order for leadership, and definitely not one for the faint of heart. You've risen to your position as a leader because you have achieved results and are considered a bright and intelligent person, right?

Organizations put people in leadership positions because these people have made a valued contribution and the organization wants to leverage that. Many who are made leaders, though, are so focused on achieving specific goals, they lose sight of the impact they are having on people, despite the fact that clearly the only way these goals are going to be met is through the collective efforts of those being led. In order to achieve real success and generate the greatest return, you must capture the imaginations, the hearts and the minds of the people you lead. In short, you better get what it means to really harness all of the human energy and resources available to you, if you want to lead your organization to achieving optimal success.

So what do grace and dignity have to do with a better way of leading? Let's look for moment at the meanings of these two words:

Grace is the quality or state of *being* considerate or thoughtful. In a spiritual context, it also has a connection with a higher power providing divine assistance.

Dignity is the quality or state of *being* worthy, honored or esteemed.

Both of these words are situated in the context of “being” as opposed to “doing.” Take a moment to reflect on how you rose to your current position of leadership. It likely has had more to do with doing (i.e., achieving results) than

being. Yet, now that you are here, your greatest ally for powerful leadership is how you “be.”

You have the biggest opportunity of all with the people you lead. You can compel them, repel them or hold them neutral. So you have a choice: Do you want to inspire them to do their best work, stall them by being indifferent, or encourage mediocrity through negative interactions? I would assume you want to create the best possible outcomes for your organization. Yet, without consistently reflecting on what your intentions are as a leader, “stuff” simply happens. You hold the potential for your workplace, its people and its results to be extraordinary. Simply permit yourself to consciously engage aspects of leadership that might otherwise remain dormant within you.

To begin with, take a moment and ask yourself these questions:

- What if I consciously chose to lead with grace and dignity *always*?
- What would be possible for me, the people I lead, and the organization I serve?
- What would it cost me?
- What would be different in my way of leading, if I chose grace and dignity?
- What would be hard for me about leading this way?

Note your responses, as they will provide wisdom as you continue to explore new possibilities for your leadership. And know this:

Wisdom is intuitive knowledge of the truth.

Element #1—It's All About You: The Self-Aware Leader

You know it is a funny thing, this focus on self. Many of us are taught from an early age to focus on others, and we don't want to talk about or think about our own needs, desires or even our behaviors sometimes. Yet, as a leader, until you are clear about who you are, what you value, what you want to affect, how you impact others, and whether you lead from a place of fear or inspiration, you are not at the top of your game. My experience suggests that until we get it right within ourselves, we cannot possibly create the best in our relationships with others or in the culture of our organizations.

So, how do we achieve this state of self-awareness? One might argue that with more than 60,000 books on leadership and management, providing tips and techniques about how you can be more effective, get better results and be more inspiring, that we simply need to visit a library or bookstore. Is that all there is to it? I say no. We tend to rely too much on what others say about how we should lead and not enough on our own inner wisdom. This inner wisdom holds amazing gifts for each of us, if we take time to do the work on ourselves first. And it does take time, it requires reflection, and we must give ourselves permission to be vulnerable.

The most powerful ally a leader has, is not found in a book, but within oneself. The invitation is to access your inner wisdom and natural strengths, reclaim them and fully express them in work and life.

It can be unnerving to allow yourself to be exposed as you begin to unfold your truths, and discover the places where you are not acting in alignment with your values and strengths. Having witnessed people struggle with this leadership

challenge over the past 20 years, it is clear to me that leaders can be assisted in their development of self-awareness, by helping them to understand their authentic selves and align their business practices with their values. This inner journey of leadership addresses clarifying values, accessing their natural strengths, passions and purpose (each of which may have become estranged from them during the climb up the corporate ladder), and then learning how to leverage all of these elements in service of the organizations they lead and of themselves. With this inner learning and wisdom, leaders “show up” from their real place of power. Working from their leadership soul, they are best able to inspire and create a culture of trust, commitment and clarity of purpose for all.

In the spirit of believing that you have tremendous leadership wisdom within yourself, let’s begin from where you are now. Reflect for a moment on how you currently operate as a leader and ask yourself these questions:

- Despite my knowledge of what it means to be a powerful leader, what behaviors do I manifest that have the potential to net my organization less than optimal results? How is this making me feel?
- What are my top 10 personal values? Write them down. How do I honor them today? Are my behaviors in alignment with my values? Where are the gaps?
- What are my top three strengths? How do I use these strengths daily? Where am I not using them to their fullest? What gets in my way? How important is it to be fully playing to my strengths? What are the costs to *me* when I do not play to my strengths?

Make a note of your thoughts related to these questions. This is the first step in creating more awareness of your current state. These are only a few questions of many that you could explore to become more self-aware. A crucial first step in shifting any behavior is simply noticing what is presently occurring and what it is creating for you and others.

Integrating Your Insights

An interesting observation about people: they don't always act on what they know. So knowledge, and making personal changes as a result of that knowledge, are two very different things. You have lots of information at your disposal. You may even have some new knowledge from your personal reflections right in this moment, and still not incorporate it into how you choose to behave.

Leaders are often well-read and knowledgeable about what to do, in terms of leading, and yet they get in their own way. You may get in your own way because you have “blind spots” that preclude you from shifting the status quo. The good news is these blind spots can be turned into “sweet spots” when you remember that this work of leadership begins with your own self-awareness! Once you are more consistently self-aware, you can fully focus on your unique strengths. We must invest time to understand our strengths, hone them and use them, and not default to emulating someone else or unconsciously slip into exhibiting behaviors that are not in alignment with who we are.

This journey of leadership is definitely an inside job! To do this inner work, you need to treat yourself with compassion (always remember, grace and dignity for yourself first). This kind of self-development can make you feel vulnerable at times. And paradoxically, when you stay in the discomfort of the vulnerability and are truthful with yourself and others (even in the face of opposing views), you create and display a new kind of power. A power that is rooted in humility. Vulnerability, power and humility provide a wonderful triad for great leadership.

Those leaders with whom I have worked, who have committed to really looking at their own barriers, doing the work of clarifying their values and strengths, and holding themselves accountable to continually practicing and

observing their evolved way of being, are experiencing extraordinary results. And what they notice is that when they slip back into an old way of behaving out of fear, or feeling a loss of control, they find they get more stressed and do not get the best results with their people or the organizations they serve. They also have noticed that they are far more engaging when they are behaving from who they really are, for example:

- a leader who despite being in a culture that values charismatic, extroverted energy, is now very effective and confident with a quiet, more reserved style of leadership; or
- a senior executive accountable for a major re-engineering process who now always takes time to talk with team leaders one-on-one to help them transition to a new business focus, even in a fast-paced culture that is hardfocused on bottom-line results.

These leaders are renewed in themselves, they are more confident and they are achieving better organizational results, with ease. And their people love them! When you are willing to learn more about yourself, discover your blind spots, and reorient yourself to behave in ways that are more in alignment with who you really are, you are awakening the real leader in you.

Your vision will become clear when you can look into your heart.

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens.

Carl Jung

Emotional Awakening

In order to grow as an awakened leader, you are called to become more emotionally aware. As you are more emotionally aware, you also become more skilled at recognizing, acknowledging and supporting the needs of others, and creating more connected relationships. This opens up huge potential for

designing more productive work relationships that are empowered and rooted in real shared accountability for the outcome, whether that is a challenging conversation or a project deliverable. As your awareness grows and you hold yourself more accountable for your own behaviors, you naturally hold others accountable for their behaviors in a new light. More than ever, in today's business world, extraordinary results are achieved through strong relationships. And this can only happen fully when you are first in an emotionally aware relationship with yourself!

There are a number of well-known experts in this area of study, including Daniel Goleman and Reuven Bar On. Bar On describes emotional intelligence as a set of non-analytical skills and competencies that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with life's demands and pressures. These competencies include such attributes as inter- and intra-personal behaviors, the ability to manage stress, adaptability, sense of control, outlook and initiative. The inner work of the awakened leader includes being emotionally aware. Emotional awareness is typically not the type of learning and training you get as you progress into more senior roles in organizations. And yet, in order to be effective in creating a positive culture, inspire others to deliver their best, and embrace and leverage differences to attain better results, you need to both respect others and be tuned into your own and other's emotional barometers. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- What is your ability to read your own emotions in any situation? How aware are you at any given time about what you are feeling?
- What is your ability to think and act independently in challenging situations? How would you describe yourself under pressure?
- How do you manage stress? When is it most difficult for you?
- What are your strategies to find new ways of handling challenges and problems? Where do you get stuck?
- What are your beliefs about control—of situations, of people?

- How would your people say you are at empathizing with them and their situations? What is your belief about empathy in the workplace? About showing emotion in the workplace? About dealing with someone who is eliciting an emotional response to something in the workplace?
- How would you rate your sense of optimism? And what about your ability to take initiative, even in the face of ambiguity?

These questions are not intended in any way to take the place of an in-depth assessment of emotional intelligence; rather, they are intended to have you pondering your own emotional barometer.

Element #2— It's All in the Dance: *Creating Inspiring Relationships*

Leadership that is built on the foundation of grace and dignity requires you to acknowledge that you are not alone, but rather, are in a dance—the relationship dance. The sooner you begin your own dance, where you'll move with your own vulnerabilities, fears and strengths, the better equipped you'll be to enter into the dance with those you lead. If you are going to lead fully, you gotta know the dance!

As you know, dancing is more pleasant when you feel graceful and dignified. All dances can be wonderful expressions of energy, some of them may be wild and some may be peaceful. And if you want to be accomplished at the dance, you should know the steps and then be committed to put them into practice. So let's get started. Think about this:

- What are you trying to create with your team?
- What do they need to know about you and what you want from them?
- When was the last time you had this kind of conversation with your team?
- What do you need to know about what they want from you?

- How do you know that you are in a productive relationship with your people—in service of the organizational goals? What is your check-in process with them?
- How do you handle your people, when you don't know the next steps?
- What is the biggest dream for your team? What is the worst disappointment you could imagine?

As you continue to create an emotionally aware relationship with your team, you will experience an enhanced ability to effectively manage with consistency, even in the challenging times. There are a number of principles that I have found particularly helpful with my clients as they learn to more successfully navigate the relationships in the workplace, and elsewhere too. In order to be in a productive and energizing relationship, there are a number of behaviors you need to exhibit as the leader, and also be willing to call forth in your people:

Maintain mutual respect—even in the face of differing opinions or perspectives. Honor each other for what you bring to the relationship, even in the face of challenge.

Hold the bigger picture—the work relationship is about creating something bigger than any one of you. As the leader, you hold up the mirror of possibilities for the team. You carry the vision and the dream, always.

Withhold judgement—in the service of allowing all aspects and expressions of difference to be heard, and keeping communication open. This requires a lot of selfmanagement on your part. At some point, decisions need to be made, and it is critical to the health of the relationship that everyone feels their voice is considered. You do need to make independent decisions sometimes.

Put the team first—since you are not in this relationship alone and you are responsible for inspiring the team to work to the good of the whole organization. You are accountable for everyone understanding that the team comes first.

Demonstrate heart—if you demonstrate heart and lead with compassion, grace and dignity, this invites others to do the same. When people know you

care, they care. Ensure that your heart-filled intention always lines up with your behavior. When this happens, people trust you. When trust is present, magic happens. In the relationship, all parties will feel free to take risks, in service of new solutions. When heart is present, the relationship dance will be more fun, more committed and more abundant.

Think about these questions:

- What would be different if you led with your heart?
- What scares you about that?
- What is exhilarating about leading with heart?

In a final reflection about the dance of the relationship and its connection to your leadership, contemplate the following:

- What are three things your employees would say about your relationship with them today?
- And about the dream... How is your team engaged in the dream? Where is their opportunity to be more directly involved? What are the risks in giving them more ownership? What are the potential wins?
- What is your strategy to build and nurture the relationship with the team? With each member of the team?
- How do you feel about more inclusion of your people? Pay attention to the places where you feel uncomfortable. What is this about?

Your role is to make things happen through people, in order to best serve the organization as a whole. In this segment on the leadership dance, we have touched on the potential for delivering better results through a dance with your people that is engaging, inspiring, fun and sometimes vulnerable. Success is dependent on you getting work done through your people. They rely on you to know the steps and take the lead, even when the going gets tough.

Element #3—Grace Under Fire

Courage is an act of leading through the unknown.

Having great relationships with people at work is easier when things are on an even keel. It's when the going gets tough that really defines the type of leader you are. When it comes to extraordinary leadership, I say that when the going gets tough, the tough get grace. Obviously, you need to be tough-minded, and you need to lead with heart and compassion as well. Intellectually, you know that when the heat gets turned up, you need to stay calm and unwavering. When faced with such uncertainty, however, what one knows is the right thing to do isn't always sufficient. You need to summon the deepest part of yourself (accessing your values, natural strengths, your emotionally aware self) to show up with courage and commitment to lead fully through the situation.

These are the times when people are watching most intently, needing encouragement, and believing that you can manage what needs to happen in a way that demonstrates personal honesty and preserves organizational integrity. This will be your finest hour of demonstrating grace and dignity. There is no higher contribution you can make as a leader. So when you are faced with great challenge, and perhaps the unknown, how will you be? Think of times of great challenge in your life and reflect on how you handled yourself and those around you and the decisions you made. Review and answer the following questions:

- Think of a difficult situation you faced as a leader. How was your behavior different or the same, compared to how you were in your normal state of day-to-day actions? What was most striking about how you were in the crisis situation?
- How could this way of operating help you in your day-to-day way of leading? What might the lessons be for you—from your handling of a crisis?

- Where was your focus in the crisis? Where is your focus typically on any given day? Any differences, similarities?

What I have experienced with a number of my clients who have faced challenging leadership moments, is that when a crisis hit they either:

- moved into a mode where they were clear, focused and operating for the greater good of the situation, resulting in actions grounded in their values and natural strengths. And at the same time they were able to pay attention to and learn from the external environment and be open to new creative possibilities. That is, they were open-minded; or
- they became focused on what was happening to them, and they led from a place of protecting their own interests. They acted often in isolation of others' input, and after the fact, they realized they were not playing from their strengths but from a place of trying to control the outcome at all costs.

There are lessons in all situations, if you are prepared to learn from them without judgement. On reflection, you can leverage what worked, learn more about yourself, and contemplate how you would choose to react in a similar situation the next time.

Element # 4 — Creating Legacy by *Leading With Courage*

In each moment of leadership, you are creating your legacy. Legacy is not something to put off until you are old and retired (or simply tired). Rather it is about consciously creating it each day as you lead with courage through uncertainty, new challenges, change and wonderful possibilities.

- What is the legacy you are creating today?
- What would your people say about your legacy?
- What is your impact right now?

Legacy is an enduring gift of the soul.

You always choose how you will lead—every day, and in every situation and every conversation. Carry a mantra with you and it will help you when facing unknowns, new challenges and even some of the simple day-to-day situations that may unnerve you. You could tell yourself, “Walk through this with grace and dignity.” This mantra is calming and helps in focusing. I know it has helped me. Believe that you can demonstrate those attributes at your most difficult times, and serve as a model for how you want others to act.

So, I ask you now, what mantra will you use when facing your biggest challenges? You have an amazing opportunity to design greatness that will result in extraordinary results for you and those you lead. Simply surrender to the voice of your inner wisdom that calls you to lead courageously with grace and dignity, paying attention to what you know about yourself, and the mark you want to leave every day.

You have all you need. You can choose to be the leader that our world needs today, one who is self-aware and inspires people. One who develops relationships that foster great work and delivers excellence. And finally, one who leads courageously and creates legacy daily, in service of the whole organization. Just begin.



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Joanne McLean is a certified executive leadership and team coach. Her mission is being a catalyst for leaders and their teams to access their authentic leadership power and leverage their strengths. Joanne motivates and teaches leaders to captain their lives and businesses in ways that produces fulfilling, sustainable results, while doing it on their own terms. She believes that leadership is a sacred calling and has great respect for those who choose to lead.

Prior to launching Soulzatwork™, Joanne's 20-year career journey took her into senior roles in global corporations (high-tech and pharmaceutical sectors) in employee health management, business development, marketing communications and strategic human resources, including leadership development, succession planning and executive coaching. This diverse business experience has allowed her to work strategically with senior executives and also with senior management teams. As an entrepreneur, Joanne has owned and operated her own fitness and wellness consulting business and worked as an external business and health consultant for numerous organizations.

Joanne understands that leaders must act fast, work with integrity and get results. She works with leaders and their teams to create a better way to work, resulting in enhanced business outcomes and amazing work relationships.

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