

Spiritually Intelligent Leadership

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by Danah Zohar

What makes a great leader? Some say it is the ability to give a clear sense of direction. Some, that it is the ability to make tough decisions. Others, that great leadership is the ability to command and control, or, conversely, to inspire loyalty in those led through strong emotional empathy. I think that great leadership depends primarily on vision--not just any type of vision, but one that we can appreciate intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

A vision is something we reach for, something we aspire to, something that is the glue of our enterprise, the driving force, the vitality within it. When we are touched by a vision, our deepest values come into play and we have a sense of abiding purpose to our enterprise. In our world today, the thing we are most lacking is leaders who can convey vision.

One reason that visionary leadership is in short supply today is the value our society places on one particular kind of capital--material capital. Too often the worth or value of an enterprise is judged by how much money it earns at the end of the day, or how much worldly power it gives us over others. This obsession with material gain has led to short-term thinking and the narrow pursuit of self-interest. It is true that any kind of enterprise we want to engage in requires some kind of financial wealth if it is to succeed in the short term. But for leadership to inspire long-term, sustainable enterprises, it needs to pursue two other forms of capital as well: social and spiritual. These three types of capital resemble the layers in a wedding cake. Material capital is the top layer, social capital lies in the middle, and spiritual capital rests on the bottom, supporting all three.

According to political economist Francis Fukuyama, who wrote *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Wealth*, social capital can be measured by the amount of trust in a society, empathy people feel for each other, and commitment to the health of the community. The health of the community, he says, can be measured by criteria such as the rate of crime, divorce, illiteracy, and litigation.

A New Paradigm of Intelligence

Even more fundamentally, spiritual capital reflects what an individual or an organization exists for, believes in, aspires to, and takes responsibility for. Our spiritual capital includes our moral capital. Spiritual capital is a new paradigm that requires that we radically change our mind-set about the philosophical foundations and practices of leadership in business--or in any other enterprise, for that matter. I am not referring here to concerning ourselves with religion or spiritual practices. Rather, I mean the power a leader can unleash in individuals or organizations by evoking people's deepest meanings, values, and purposes.

Leaders build all three forms of capital--material, social, and spiritual--by using their own intelligence. But here I am not just referring to IQ. I want to include the intelligence of the mind, the heart, and the spirit. I have written a great deal about the types of intelligence that correlate to the three types of capital:

- **IQ**, or intelligence quotient, was discovered in the early 20th century and is tested using the

Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. It refers to our rational, logical, rule-bound, problem-solving intelligence. It is supposed to make us bright or dim. It is also a style of rational, goal-oriented thinking. All of us use some IQ, or we wouldn't be functional.

- **EQ** refers to our emotional intelligence quotient. In the mid-1990s, in *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, Daniel Goleman articulated the kind of intelligence that our heart, or emotions, have. EQ is manifested in trust, empathy, self-awareness, and self-control, and in the ability to respond appropriately to the emotions of others. It's a sense of where people are coming from; for example, if a boss or colleague seems to have had a fight at home before coming into the office that morning, it's not the best time to ask for a pay raise or put a new idea across.

- **SQ**, our spiritual intelligence quotient, underpins IQ and EQ. Spiritual intelligence is an ability to access higher meanings, values, abiding purposes, and unconscious aspects of the self and to embed these meanings, values, and purposes in living a richer and more creative life. Signs of high SQ include an ability to think out of the box, humility, and an access to energies that come from something beyond the ego, beyond just me and my day-to-day concerns. SQ is the ultimate intelligence of the visionary leader. It was the intelligence that guided men and women like Churchill, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa. The secret of their leadership was their ability to inspire people, to give them a sense of something worth struggling for.

12 Principles of Spiritually Intelligent Leadership

I believe that all human beings are born with the capacity to use all three intelligences to some measure, because each contributes toward survival. A leader may be strong in one and weak in others, but each can be nurtured and developed. Spiritually intelligent leadership can be fostered by applying 12 principles:

- **Self-Awareness:** Knowing what I believe in and value, and what deeply motivates me
- **Spontaneity:** Living in and being responsive to the moment
- **Being Vision- and Value-Led:** Acting from principles and deep beliefs, and living accordingly
- **Holism:** Seeing larger patterns, relationships, and connections; having a sense of belonging
- **Compassion:** Having the quality of "feeling-with" and deep empathy
- **Celebration of Diversity:** Valuing other people for their differences, not despite them
- **Field Independence:** Standing against the crowd and having one's own convictions
- **Humility:** Having the sense of being a player in a larger drama, of one's true place in the world
- **Tendency to Ask Fundamental "Why?" Questions:** Needing to understand things and get to the bottom of them
- **Ability to Reframe:** Standing back from a situation or problem and seeing the bigger picture; seeing problems in a wider context
- **Positive Use of Adversity:** Learning and growing from mistakes, setbacks, and suffering
- **Sense of Vocation:** Feeling called upon to serve, to give something back

I derive these principles from the qualities that define complex adaptive systems. In biology, complex adaptive systems are living systems that create order out of chaos. They are highly unstable, poised at the edge of chaos, and that is what makes them so sensitive. These systems are holistic, emergent, and respond creatively to mutations. They're in constant

creative dialogue with the environment.

Each one of us is a conscious complex adaptive system, both physically and mentally. Any great enterprise on which we hope to embark will have flexible boundaries and be in constant creative dialogue with its environment. As I describe the properties of conscious complex adaptive systems, I am also describing the qualities of great, spiritually intelligent leadership, underpinned by vision, purpose, meaning, and values.

Self-Awareness. This principle differs from Daniel Goleman's emotional self-awareness, which refers to knowing what we're feeling at any given moment. Spiritual self-awareness means to recognize what I care about, what I live for, and what I would die for. It's to live true to myself while respecting others. Being authentic in this way is the bedrock of genuine communication with our own deeper self and with others we would lead. It allows us to bring the truth of the inner self into the outer world of action.

Spontaneity. Being spontaneous does not mean merely acting on whim, it refers to authentic behavior honed by the self-discipline, practice, and self-control of the martial artist. To be spontaneous means letting go of all our baggage--childhood problems, prejudices, assumptions, interpretations, and projections--and being responsive to the moment, appreciating "the power of now." And "spontaneity" echoes "responsibility," which reminds us to use it responsibly in the moment.

Being Vision- and Value-Led. Vision is the capacity to see something that inspires us; it means something broader than a company vision or a vision for educational development. It seeks answers to the bigger, more difficult questions, such as Why do we want the world to have our products? And, What are we trying to educate children for? When my son was five, he knocked me backward with the question, "Mommy, why do I have a life?" It took me months to think of an appropriate answer. He was probably expecting me to say, "So you can be rich or so you can be a good doctor." Instead, I finally told him, "You have a life so you can leave the world a better place than you found it. You have a life so that you can make a difference." I don't know what he made of that at five, but he's at university now, and we recently had the same conversation. "Mom, shall I go to university? What shall I study? I feel a bit lost." And again I said to him, "Follow your heart. Don't think what Mom and Dad want you to do. Follow what you want to do. But whatever you do, make a difference with it." That's having a life that's led by vision and values.

Holism. In quantum physics, holism refers to systems that are so integrated that each part is defined by every other part of the system. What I think, feel, and value affects the whole world. Holism encourages cooperation, because as you realize you're part of the same system as everyone else, you take responsibility for your part in it. A lack of holism encourages competition, which encourages separateness. For our human enterprises to be more effective, we need leaders who can foster cooperation and a sense of oneness.

Compassion. In Latin, compassion is defined as "feeling with." I don't just recognize or accept your feelings, I feel them. This is particularly hard to do with someone who has hurt you. Can you feel the pain and frustration behind their behavior? You don't have to let them treat you that way, and often you do have to fight. But fight with compassion, with understanding, with knowledge of your enemy.

Celebration of Diversity. Compassion is strongly linked to the principle of diversity. Many organizations offer diversity programs that involve, for example, putting a token woman on

the board of directors or ensuring that the workforce contains specified percentages of various ethnic groups. But I mean something different. We celebrate our differences because they teach us what matters.

Growing up, I was part of a large extended family that got together every Thanksgiving and Christmas. We were a mixture of Republicans and Democrats, Catholics and Protestants and a few Jews, and everyone had very strong opinions that they liked to express. So my mother made a rule at these dinners that we could talk about anything but politics and religion. Every single holiday, by the time we tucked in to the turkey, everybody broke the rules. All hell would break loose as people shouted and called each other names. My Aunt Vera always left the table weeping, and my mother always trembled. I thrived on it. This was my kindergarten of debate and dialogue. It taught me that this type of expression is where the energy is in a group. The passion of the family, our ability to learn from each other, was in our differences. A great leader helps us to draw on these. Our differences teach us what matters.

When people disagree with me, they literally make me grow new neurons. I have to rewire my brain, challenge my assumptions, and question my values. I learn. When a group experiences divisive, painful issues, some people ask, dare we confront them? Mightn't they split us? Shouldn't we put aside our differences and see what we can agree about? Absolutely not. Celebrate the differences. Cauterize the pain by letting it come out. That's where the passion and energy are in our collaborations. When a leader inspires the surfacing of such discomforts in a spirit of dialogue, the shared enterprise becomes a container that can hold all that diversity and allow it to emerge into something new. By not bringing it into the group, we lose that energy. Celebrating diversity means that I appreciate that you rattle my cage, because by doing so, you make me think and grow.

Field Independence. Field independence is a term from psychology that means "to stand against the crowd," to be willing to be unpopular for what I believe in. It's a willingness to go it alone, but only after carefully considering what others have to say. Any visionary leader must, almost by definition, stand alone sometimes. Such leaders are often ahead of the times.

Humility. Humility is the necessary other side of field independence, whereby I realize that I am one actor in a larger play and that I might be wrong. So I question myself ruthlessly. Am I right to think what I do? Have I listened to all the arguments against it? Have I thought deeply about it? Humility makes a leader great, not small. It makes us proud to be a voice in a choir.

Tendency to Ask Fundamental "Why?" Questions. "Why?" is subversive, and people are often frightened by questions without easy answers. Why are we doing it this way rather than that way? Why am I in this collaboration, and what does it exist for? Why aren't we doing something else? Einstein said that as a boy he was in trouble all the time at school because the teachers accused him of asking stupid questions. When he became famous, he joked that now that everybody thought he was a genius, he was allowed to ask all the stupid questions he liked. Answers are a finite game played within boundaries, rules, and expectations. Questions are an infinite game; they play with the boundaries, they define them. Great leaders are called by great questions.

Ability to Reframe. Reframing refers to the ability to stand back from a situation and look for the bigger picture. One of the greatest problems of our world today is short-term thinking. As those from the business community know, most corporations keep an eye on three months down the road when the quarterly returns come in and shareholder value is paid out. One executive I quote in my new book says, "We can't afford to think about future

generations because we have to think about our customers' needs now and our profits now." According to that executive, business is not a custodian for future generations. Education too has become consumed with short-term thinking. By focusing on exams, schools are trying to measure the progress children have made at the end of a year rather than cultivating their infinite potential as human beings.

Positive Use of Adversity. This principle is about owning, recognizing, accepting, and acknowledging mistakes. How many of us get trapped in courses of action because the initial step we took was a mistake and we didn't want to lose face by admitting it? Rather than having the courage to acknowledge our error, we pursue the mistaken course of action, digging ourselves deeper into the mess. Have you ever admitted a mistake to someone where it really hurt to do so? Did you notice a surge of energy afterward? I have learned a great deal from doing this. Great passion and energy can be released by saying the simple words, "I made a mistake. What I did was wrong, and therefore I'm now going to embark on a different course." Great leaders have the confidence to admit mistakes.

Positive use of adversity is also the ability to recognize that suffering is inevitable in life. There are painful things for human beings to deal with, yet they make us stronger, wiser, and braver. How boring we would be if we never had any adversity in our lives!

Sense of Vocation. This principle sums up spiritual intelligence and spiritual capital. Vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, "to be called." Originally, it referred to a priest's calling to God. Today it often refers to the professions such as medicine, teaching, and law. It's my ideal that business will become a vocation that appeals to people with a larger purpose and a desire to make wealth that benefits not only those who create it but also the community and the world. I call the business leaders who might bring about such a change "knights," men and women who, like the Knights Templar of the Middle Ages, take a vow of service to something higher than themselves.

Great leaders have the confidence to admit mistakes.

Changing Human Behavior

In *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World*, John Sterman provides a blueprint for how to make a system work effectively. But, he points out, only if the people in a system behave as they should will the system work as it should. Most systems have the same failing--human behavior.

If we want to change systems, we have to change human behavior. But human behavior is not so easily changed. To achieve real transformation, we have to change the motivations that drive behavior. That is the prime responsibility of a visionary leader. Today business, politics, education, and society in general are driven by four negative motivations: fear, greed, anger, and self-assertion. When we are controlled by these negative emotions, we trust both ourselves and others less, and we tend to act from a small place inside ourselves.

We can change our motivations to more positive ones if inspired to do so. A leader practicing the 12 principles of SQ can provide that inspiration and the energy it unleashes. I use the analogy of a pinball machine to explain attractors, a concept from chaos theory. Attractors are points that either collect energy or disperse it. In a pinball machine, the attractors are the little pits into which the steel balls fall. Our motivations are like these pits, and the steel balls are our behaviors. If you want to move the balls in a pinball machine, you pull back the spring and shoot another ball into the system, causing everything to fly and relocate.

Pumping spiritual intelligence into our motivational system works the same way. It knocks the balls out of their current motivational pockets and allows them to relocate. In this way, when we apply the 12 principles of spiritual transformation to our collaborations and our lives, self-assertion becomes exploration, anger becomes cooperation, craving becomes self-control, fear becomes mastery, and so forth. Our motivations have been raised and this changes our behavior. As our behavior changes, our results change, as well as the whole purpose and meaning of our collaborations.

People may accuse us of being naively hopeful to think that great leadership is possible and that it can make the world a better place. But I believe in "knights," and their power to channel spiritual intelligence. I close with a credo I have written for would-be knights of business:

Credo of a Business Knight

Real transformation requires changing the motivations that drive behavior.

I believe that global business has the money and the power to make a significant difference in today's troubled world, and that by making that difference it can help itself as well as others. I envisage business raising its sights above the bottom line. I envisage business becoming a vocation, like the higher professions. To make this possible I believe that business must add a moral dimension, becoming more service- and value-oriented and largely eliminating the assumed natural distinction between private enterprise and public institutions. I envisage business taking responsibility for the world in which it operates and from which it creates its wealth. And I envisage myself becoming one of those business leaders who are "servant leaders"--leaders who serve not just stockholders, colleagues, employees, products, and customers, but also the community, the planet, humanity, the future, and life itself.

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