



THE INVISIBLE DIMENSION OF LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

Part I

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The following essay is the first in a two part series by Paul Nakai in collaboration with Dustin W. Seale. Look for the second installment, entitle “The Invisible Dimension of Leadership and Culture: Part II” in the 2019 *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.

The ultimate success of any venture and organization is determined by how it is perceived by those it employs as well as by those it serves. Much of the focus to maximize this effect has been localized to the behaviors, attitudes and feelings that seem to accompany this phenomenon. There have been numerous endeavors that train customer service skills, listening, coaching, positive attitudes, quality, etc. Each intervention has yielded insightful results, but have they been able to fulfill their maximal intention?

Some organizations seem to consistently be the model of embodying this capacity to establish, maintain and constantly



further their capacity for respectful and regenerative rapport with everyone in their community and industry. In spite of the fact that they are not always moving in a positive and contributory fashion, they tend to have the ability to restore themselves in the eyes of those they serve and those they employ. In unproductive times, they seem to have the capacity to rebound and get back on the path of growth and improvement. There appears to be a joy in working with the people of these companies. More than once, you hear from both employees and customers ... “I don’t know what it is but there is a special feeling that comes from working with you people. Let’s keep it up.”

In addition, they appear to progressively develop what is meaningful to them. They have the consciousness that differentiate between efforts to “find” their meaning or purpose as if it were something pre-ordained or prescribed ... and developing this meaning in a evolutionary journey. It does not come easily and requires effort and a sense of personal resilience.

The factor that enables this awakening in others appears to be the “secret sauce” behind what they do. But it is only “secret” because it goes beyond the visible dimensions of behaviors, results, feelings and attitudes. These companies appear to be adept in the more invisible dimension that seems to make it all work.

The challenge for this paper is to make visible the invisible. Although there may be more, we’ve identified four awarenesses and four principles that have a dramatic affect on



enabling this rapport ... or how the organization interfaces with the world and its people. It is the stuff that reputations are built upon. Although there are numerous facets of the “invisible dimension” of leadership and organizational culture, we start our journey together by presenting the following four awarenesses and four principles for your consideration.

Foundational Four Awarenesses:

- The attraction of success and the repulsion of failure
- The visible and the invisible
- Walking through life as a transmitter and as a receiver
- Living in abundance and scarcity

Foundational Four Principles:

- The Mindset of Humanity
- The Healthy Thriving Mindset
- The Leadership Mindset
- The Culture Mindset

SUCCESS AND FAILURE: FOUNDATIONAL AWARENESS #1

From the moment we are born, we are taught that we need to learn the rules of effectively pursuing success and the rules behind avoiding failure. Throughout much of our lives, we are encouraged to be successful and admonished when we are not. Many of the influences on our life keep moving us in that direction. From that, we see life in a dualistic way ... good vs. bad ... right vs. wrong ... rich vs. poor ... powerful vs. weak. Early on, our goal is to make the decisions that will yield the



best result for us while avoiding failure or disappointment. We are impatient to choose and sometimes take the tact that making any decision is better than making no decision at all. When it works, we are happy ... and when it doesn't, we are stressed.

However, there are numerous examples where highly effective leaders appear to know when to display uncanny patience and avoid the pressure of having to prematurely choose. These leaders realize that there is a third option to follow. When they do decide, frequently their choice embraces the grains of truth in both selections of the dualistic options. When they access this third option, they tend to yield a Solomon-like wiser, higher order selection. They've developed the intuitive capacity to be able to cull out these grains of truth much of the time. They seem to access both the visible and invisible sources of truth and hold them all simultaneously until a higher order insight occurs. Again, they hear others comment "how did you come up with that?".

Have you experienced this capacity yourself?¹

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE: FOUNDATIONAL AWARENESS #2

We are also taught at an early age that our success is measured by our accumulating the tangible forms of "wealth". That could be measured in how much money that we make, the

¹ For another example of the Foundational Awareness #1, please see *The Opposable Mind* by Roger Martin and *Creating Great Choices* by Jennifer Riel and Roger Martin.



number of friends that we have, how well we could perform on the sports field and the grades that we achieved. If we were fortunate, we were also taught that the invisible, intangible part of life was equally important.

The number of friends that we had were not as important as the quality of love that existed with your friends ... or the spirit of sportsmanship that you displayed on the field ... or your sense of contribution as well as your sense of achievement.

It's just that the tangible is easier to "see", "touch," and "measure". The intangible can be experienced through our intuition, sense of the future and the "vibes" that we pick up from others Both can be experienced. Being invisible does not mean that it doesn't exist. Nor does it mean that it does. It might only mean that this is the starting point of the journey.

The effective leader has a foot in both camps ... the tangible and visible elements of reality AND the intangible and invisible elements of whatever he/she looks at. Together they are the elements that lead to the most effective decisions made and actions taken.

You can touch, see and feel the tangible side of life all around you. It is found in the results that you achieve and of the infrastructure of the organization you work in. The tangible world is often found in how people describe the community you live in. It is what most resumes report to the world. For many, it is the foundation for considering oneself successful.

However, that's not all. Many feel that long-term inspiration, contribution, foresight and fulfillment also comes from the invisible demension. Frequently this dimension is



captured in our purpose and sense of meaning. It is found in the quality and health of our relationships and in our non-contingent sense of evolution, discovery and growth. We asked a number of CEOs which of their attributes was the most rewarding and effective? Along these lines, we also asked them what they were looking for in the leaders of their organization. In addition to competency skills and experience, we spent a bit of time discussing some of their other responses. As they said:

“I look for someone who has had the experience of “seeing around corners.” It’s not a linear process and is an intuitive prescience. It involves accessing foresight and insight rather than guessing or returning to the status quo. They have an accurate and respected sense of the future.

“They also quickly establish deep and trusted rapport with people they meet and they appear to project an enthusiastic openness to creation, re-invention and innovation.”

As an example, one of our hospital CEOs would try to keep this curiosity and paradigm-breaking spirit alive in his staff. He was a model of “out-of-the box thinking.” He would annually have a healthcare futurist address his management team. He would open many of his leadership meetings with quieting and centering contemplation. He sponsored development programs for his management and for the staff addressing healthy functioning. They would use their challenges and change criteria as a launch platform to question their assumptions and paradigms of success. He would look for performance metaphors coming from other industries of times in history.



How strongly can you experience the signals of the tangible and the intangible sides of life?

TRANSMITTER AND RECEIVER: FOUNDATIONAL AWARENESS #3

As we go through life, much of our effort is to clarify our voice and our thoughts being heard. We see ourselves being more of a transmitter ... being in control of the outcomess of our efforts. We hope that our thinking has a positive influence on others. We interface with others in “telling” mode instead of “receiving” mode. We teach yesterday’s lessons instead of being open to change. We learn how to effectively articulate our position and convince others. We learn how to choreograph our approach to achieve what we want to achieve. Taken to an extreme, we do not see the unlimited source of wisdom all around us much less in our ability to tap into the depths of this evolutionary promise.

It appears easier to become an excellent transmitter of ones own thinking than to awaken and enable our ability to access this higher order thinking that surrounds us. We speak when we should be listening. We broadcast instead of invite. We selectively listen to further our stance rather than listen to others in order to be personally impacted and changed. Instead of converting the insights of others to better fit the paradigms that you already hold ... you need to listen and experience others until you are moved and transformed.

This capacity set can be found in meditation, prayer and comtemplation. It is the ongoing journey of being able to



clearly see where you are ... letting go of that stance ... and letting your wisdom take you from there. Let your ego get bored and fall asleep. Empower others by how well you listen and by the authentic vulnerability you display by the demeanor you cast and by the stories you share.

Can you see your thought habits grabbing onto what you've already learned and digested ... as well as accessing your truthful humility by admitting what you "don't know?"

ABUNDANCE AND SCARCITY: FOUNDATIONAL AWARENESS #4

My Dad used to share with me, "Wealth is not in having many possessions but in having few wants."

This would seem contradictory and hypocritical to the motivation and thinking of much of our world. After all, if "some" is good ... "more" is better. It is anti-thetical to our consumptive, hoarding, power and position world. Much of our lives are spent accumulating the trappings of security and happiness. If "might" makes "right" ... does it necessarily mean that "meek" makes "weak"?

If one only defines abundance as accumulating the elements of this ego world, i.e., power, position, financial wealth, etc., it then leads to placing the accumulation of these elements at the forefront of their lives. In protecting our physical assets, we may display traits such as bullying, intimidation, exclusion of others, politicking, and the like. We may achieve temporary notoriety but we are on a constant treadmill of alienation and ignorance of the less fortunate ...



and of the less powerful and influential.

On the contrary, it has been my experience that many of the leaders I have had the opportunity to work with live and lead from the mindset of both abundance AND scarcity. While these business leaders successfully create agile and respected organizations, they never lose the “human touch”. Their “scarcity” is not one of poverty of the physical, mental, and emotional, but seems to be one of “scarcity” of independence, accumulation, autonomy, and arrogance.

For many, they find “wealth” in their simple pleasures of abundance ... gardening, time with the family, walks, art, music and the like. They are in awe of the beauties all around us. This non-dualistic mindset manifests itself in their sense of humility and reverence for the humanity they share with others. They are tremendously grateful for the people they serve ... regardless of the circumstances or challenges. They have the “long” view of foresight and display a level of understanding that attracts rather than repels. They are grateful for the opportunity to work with and assist the less fortunate, the powerless and the poor.

This gratitude can be captured by their compassionate thought of “there but for the Grace of God could go I.”

Rudyard Kipling (1910) wrote of this dynamic tension in his poem *If*. Here are a few of his thoughts ...

IF you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs, and blaming it on you.
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting, too;



If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good nor talk too wise;

If you can dream and not make dreams your master,
If you can think, and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with triumph and disaster,
And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings,
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
and never breath a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone ...
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch,



If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much; . . .

This poem was part of Kipling's legacy to his son. Can you see when your mindset is one of a non-dualistic abundance of spirit?

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE INVISIBLE JOURNEY



As you continue to develop your sensitivity to these life elements, you will notice that your experience of each moment begins to change ... sometimes subtly and sometimes more dramatically.

You become more adept at perceiving the various invisible dimension of life. Your decisions are deeper and more



inclusive. You intuitively “know” what is happening at all levels of life.

Your journey of sensitivity begins by better informing you of your own self. You realize that your deeper being is no different than anyone else. In fact you and others share a same universal source of humanity. From this starting point, you have a greater understanding of your platform of health and thriving.

You then realize that you are more conscious of someone else. Expanding and deepening this sensitivity, your intuitive hunch gives you an impression of the collective mindset of a selectively homogeneous” group. And then you are aware of the collective consciousness of a larger universally homogeneous community. At this level, as a leader, you are making decisions that impact people you may never meet or know. As such, you have the realization that there are invisible means of communicating that defy the spoken/printed word, the choreographed experience, or the physical proximity of the stimuli.

To boost your intuitive understanding, we consider refining your capacity to experience and interpret thought, energy, oneness and evolutionary time.

For many organizational leaders, this crucial source of input manifests itself under the heading of:

Humanity: Know thy deeper self ... this is the starting gate of any change, weather-proofing and improvement endeavor. It is the foundation mindset underlying the next three principles. The humility, sincerity and accuracy of



this mindset is from whence the journey begins. This would be your statement of the humanity that you gratefully bring with you and your experience that you catalyze to every moment and to every situation. There are no “walls” or separateness between you and any other person. It is the unshakeable experience that we are ONE ... we are all brothers and sisters just with different titles and responsibilities. Unfortunately, the illusion is that we are separate from one another. The reality is that the separateness is primarily in our minds.

Healthy Thriving Mindset Principles: Know your principles of healthy and thriving functioning ... these are the pillars upon which one can further build a more loving, resilient, meaningful and contributory life. It is the realization and knowing that our interpretation of “reality” comes to us via our thoughts and senses. As such, we “own” both *what* we think (the content of our thoughts) and the fact *that* we think (the process of our thinking). Internalizing these principles enable us to be progressively appropriate to any situation. Our capacity for healthy functioning lay at the very core of our having a positive impact on the world and its people. As we live our lives through these principles, we develop the evolutionary understanding of our purpose, our interconnectedness and our boundless nature of discovery.

Also realize that the absence of dysfunction does not necessarily mean the presence of health. Some people



have learned how to mask, disguise or silence their insecurities. However, these insecurities still exist at their deeper more invisible levels having a traumatic influence on how they think behave or treat others. The principles of a healthy-thriving mindset provide an understanding that resolves the impact of this phenomenon.

Leadership Mindset: Know your organizational thought leaders and why the people consider them as such. These are the individuals that many in the organization look to for clues on how to interpret the initiatives and behave accordingly. These would be the other voices of wisdom and alignment that are trusted as well as influential in sculpting the psychological and philosophical thread that binds the organization together. Their demeanor is more dialogic rather than mandating or dictatorial. They are more inclusive and enabling than exclusive and demanding. They are the stewards for how energy and resources flow (or doesn't flow) through the organization. People are attracted and drawn to them ... but not in a popularity or ego-building way.

Organization Culture Mindset: Know your organization's culture ... simultaneous culture perception, development and evolution is the understanding that ties it all together. In its final manifestation, it directly and indirectly involves everyone in the organization and the organization itself



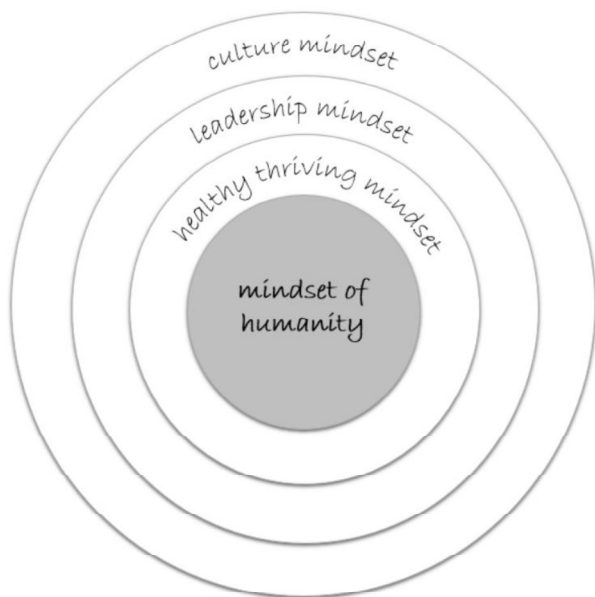
is frequently global in scope. Culture itself is even less tangibly simple but so much more powerful. In a large organization, there can be numerous cultures learning to synergistically work with each other.

Culture is the external-to-self system that influences the individual to do things or contemplate ideas that they may not do normally because it avails itself to the scrutiny and available energy of the company and of others. Your organizational culture is a manifestation of the simultaneous collective consciousness of all the people at any given moment in time. Because it embraces all of humanity, it promotes the higher resolution of seemingly opposite stances ... diversity and inclusion ... strategic direction and in-the-moment responsiveness ... principle-driven dialogue and action-based commitments. Although it cannot be fully controlled, it can be sensed, experienced and responded to. It is an interwoven, self-sustaining network of experiences, thoughts and systems that justifies why things are the way it is. It is a statement of intention and direction that is interpreted by all. On the surface, it may not look aligned until one looks below the surface at the level of mindset.

Contrary to how many of us choose to see life's experiences, we balance our need for rigorous, clearly defined descriptions and results with momentary open-ended perception. As such, we will next take a deeper look at these four mindsets.



THE MINDSET OF HUMANITY



This dynamic has been in force to a greater or lesser extent depending on the synergy that exists between the mindset of the leader and the expectations of the people that he/she leads. This then is the invisible and influential dimension behind the leaders' capability to move the organization in the direction they choose ... in many ways with the "permission" and "support" of those they lead.

At a deeper level, leading and following are the same coin. Leaders who accept their humanity with everyone else intuitively understand which path has the least resistance facing it. Followers who cherish the humanity understood by their leaders realize that they are as much leaders in their own right



as they are enthusiastic proponents of the stated journey. It is as though they are both whispering into each other's ear as to the path they need to take.

Underlying this foundational capacity is a core stance respecting the dignity and mutual humanity between all people. Are the majority of the company and its people viewed merely as faceless cogs in a vast machine or are they truly seen as human partners and collaborators in the success of the company. Are they seen as empowered individuals or merely as the recipients of edicts that need to be accomplished from a more authoritative source?

These higher order traits are characterized by qualities such as empathy, compassion, and understanding. But the subtle distinction appears to be the position from which we are standing and perceiving.

For instance, if we view our relationship from the stance from the "outside looking in", we will tend to see the differing views as coming from separate autonomous entities. If we are so motivated, we then do our best to maximize the opportunities of the situation ... or at least minimize the damage ... through skills like reframing, negotiations, debate or even arguing.

However, I have been fortunate to work with high-character leaders who have accessed a state of ONE-NESS as well as respectful separateness with those around them. They have the ability to passionately represent both sides of the coin. Frequently this state arrives with both insight and with feelings of human unity. The Cherokee word Currahee tries to capture



this non-dualistic relation. Loosely translated, it translates to “stand alone – together.”

One of those times occurred when I held my daughter for the first time. I remember looking down at her and experiencing a whip saw of feelings. The first was noticing that she was so frail, vulnerable and promising. I found myself amazed at the life that lay before her and making the commitment to help her in any way possible. She was one new person and I was another. I was making a promise to her ... from her dad to my daughter.

As sudden as that emotional and mental awareness of our individuality arrived, I also had the unnerving feeling that we were not two entities but truly only ONE. I could make the same commitments to her but this time the spirit and intention were laced with love, resilience and inter-dependency. The energy to walk with her through life rose to another level of non-contingent unconditionality.

I could understand this happening between parent and child but I wondered if it could occur between people who were not bound by a common DNA? As it turns out, many of the leaders I’ve worked with find themselves in this mindset of humanity with the people they lead and of the people they serve.

One such instance occurred when I was working with a healthcare CEO and his senior team. They were embroiled in a particularly adversarial contract negotiation with their custodial union. Because of budget constraints, the union had been working without a contract for over a year. In addition, the



custodial union was cheered on by the nurses' union whose contract negotiations were coming up in six months.

The unhealthy differences between the two groups did not stop at the negotiation table. There were instances where the cars of various senior managers were vandalized, trash drums were set ablaze outside of the CEO's windows, and threatening notes were anonymously left outside the doors to the hospitals.

The proceedings I sat in lived up to their negative reputation. There were moments of frustration, finger-pointing, profanity and accusations ... some false but some true. The proceedings appeared to hit an impasse and were going nowhere. Both the hospital CEO and the Union President decided to adjourn for an early lunch to allow everyone to cool down.

I went with the management team to the Boardroom to continue their conversation. As you might expect, the hurt and angry feelings were very fresh. Statements like "how dare they talk to us/me in that way ...", "don't they remember all of the accommodations we fought to get them regardless of the situation ...", "if they don't start to listen and dialogue, I won't put up with being insulted ... especially if they are based on lies!"

The COO noticed that the CEO was uncharacteristically quiet during the conversation. She asked him what he thought.

The CEO's response was "I have never been so proud to have people like this working in our hospitals."

The managers became quiet.

He went on to say:



“I didn’t start with this feeling. I, like you, felt hurt, angry and wrongly accused. I took everything that was said personally and wanted to defend and explain the events ... but felt frustrated because there was no listening going on.

“I felt so proud to be part of this management team because I knew what you were going through yourselves. Even more so because I knew what you were going through and because of the way that you conducted yourselves in a professional manner during the meeting.

“But something happened to me during the meeting. Instead of only seeing it through my eyes, I started imagining what it would look like through your eyes. And then I started to get a glimpse of what it looked like through the eyes of our people. What I saw wasn’t limited to the terms of the contract nor to just their time with our hospitals. It encompassed the challenges that they faced in life in general.

“I experienced a sort of ‘leveling’ ... a one-ness that we all experience our humanity in much of the same way ... we just translate that humanity slightly differently.

“I’m proud of them because I saw courageous people willing to put it on the line for the people they represented. Because this feeling is so fresh for me, I can’t tell you what it means for us at this time. Just like no one can truly tell us how to think or what to feel ... the same thing goes for our custodial staff. Perhaps we need to squeeze the confusion and yesterday’s certainty out of



the dialogue when we are talking about our intentions and limitations behind our thinking. I think that this is also important to keep in mind when we make statements about the mechanisms we can employ to apply those intentions.”

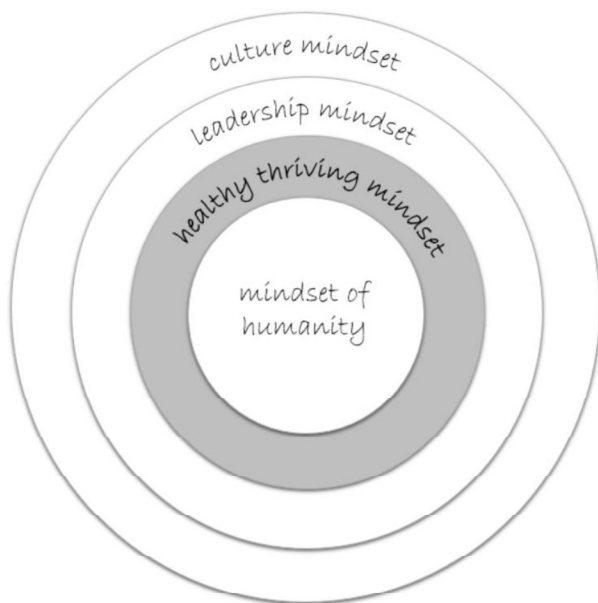
The rest of the lunch was calm. A few of the managers left the building and took a walk.

When we returned to the negotiations, there was no appreciable difference to the tone and content of the statements. However, over the course of the next couple of conversations, the accusations diminished and they reached a mutually inspired and just agreement.

I like to believe that it all started (in both camps) when they were experientially re-introduced to the humanity we all share and then reinforced by the principles of Healthy Thriving Functioning. The journey takes further shape when it is lead by healthy principled leaders and that our decisions and insights are wrapped in an agile, deliberate and evolutionary culture.



THE PRINCIPLES OF HEALTHY THRIVING FUNCTIONING



The idea of healthy, thriving functioning seems to be an innate capacity that we all share. When we allow and accept it, it is our default mode of being. Essentially it is only we who can limit its effectiveness and direction. It rests at the confluence of Mind, thought, and consciousness. It is the source of our innate conscience, our surrender to the need to take contributory action and our never-ending curiosity and desire for transformation.

Mind is the Source, limitless wisdom, energy and promise of possibility. Thought is the conduit for our interpretation and experience of what's going on around us. This is done both



through *what* we think or the content of our thoughts as well as recognizing and owning the fact *that* we think or the process of thought. Consciousness is our capacity to make it all “real” and tangible.

Early on, we failed to notice that people were blind to and did not question how or what they thought. They merely accepted their thinking as the “truth” ... and as such, everyone saw the same thing.

Based on that assumption, everyone was habitually reacting to events while in “automatic pilot” of their thought process rather than pausing, contemplating their thoughts differently and seeking to respond in a more effective manner through accessing their greater wisdom. Instead of life getting simpler because of the lessons learned, one’s life started moving in the direction of being able to better handle life’s growing complexity.

We noticed that being able to consistently perform in an improving manner regardless of change or challenge is highly dependent on one’s mental health. This mental health enabled us to take action and to learn from both our successes as well as from our disappointments. We learned to collaborate with supportive AND candid conversations while maintaining rapport with those around us. Equally important, we continued to develop both objective and subjective competencies in improvement and transformation.

I hasten to add that Healthy Thriving Functioning is not characterized by having only positive thoughts and good feelings. It is much more than the myriad of philosophical



positive thinking mental disciplines that have permeated the air waves over the years. It can also occur when life does not mirror the desires and aspirations that you hope for. Healthy functioning gives us the understanding to be able to weatherproof our spirits even in difficult times. When we can see what is happening, our resilience and perspective minimize the affects that would normally come from insecurity, anger, fear and disappointment. We regain our healthy stance more quickly and more permanently. It is the consciousness formula that resists being formulaic ... but provides the common thread that makes it all work.

The foundational idea was that so many difficulties occur in any culture because the status quo resists change. We did not see the value of receiving paradigm-changing insights (from others), humble reflection, contemplation and self-editing.

We embarked on a developmental journey that presented, internalized and applied the principles of personal healthy functioning ... or being at your “best” (not necessarily being perfect) more often. We broadened our definition of “healthy functioning” to encompass the physical, mental, emotional and inspirational demensions of life.

In addition to moving forward in a contributory fashion, we also explored the most productive ways to deal with the occasional disruptions in work, home and community life. We found that the “seeds” of effectively dealing with the dysfunctional side were the same seeds that enabled us to move forward in a healthy way. We called this understanding the principles of *Healthy Thriving Functioning*.



To fully comprehend the dynamics at play, there are at least two foundational understandings to consider in the furtherance of increasingly effective leadership. The first is the notion of consciousness. The second is how our perception of reality is developed for ourselves and subsequently transferred to others.

The first awareness is the understanding of consciousness. Consciousness is the principle that enables our ability to see our thinking as “real”. Be it positive, negative or neutral, it is the principle that creates the tangibility of the *reality* in which we reside. This capacity determines what and how we perceive and how we interpret the myriad of events, situations and people that appear before us. Even then, regardless of how real our consciousness perceives the events in our lives, it also has the magnificence to see it as the illusion of permanence that it really is and to change if we allow it to. We then see things differently and in so doing have the ability to respond to any given event in a more effective way.

At any given moment, every person lives their lives through their individual level of consciousness. In many ways, their consciousness is much like the lens through which they experience life. Their thoughts are the conduit between what they notice of any event and, in so doing, how they experience that event. This explains why many people can see the same event but witness it in as many possible ways. Their consciousness is at the root of their judgments, goals, interpretations, accusations and actions taken. It is their consciousness that enables their mindset to evolve. Extrapolating this phenomenon in any organization, that



organization's culture is the manifestation of the collective consciousness of all of the people in that organization.

But the power and transformability of one's consciousness is not the only influential dimension on the effectiveness of any given leader. The second awareness that influences how we go through life is captured by what many, if not all, of us do with our perceived consciousness. Depending on our relationship with our thinking, at any given level of consciousness, we have the ability to corroborate and substantiate that level of consciousness making it even more real, right and substantive. We have the capacity to freeze any level of consciousness we choose. Unfortunately, in so doing we stop or dramatically slow down our creativity, growth, learning and agility. The more form that we put to our contemporary consciousness, the more difficult it is to alter the form to thereby liberate our consciousness to see more accurately everything that is occurring before us. We "freeze" our consciousness by building models or systems representing our rules of life. We create metaphors and stories to create the on-going "right-ness" of our past and present perceptions. We identify the good competencies from the bad. We build a life pursuing success and avoiding failure through this consciousness. We find ways to make it work most of the time in the arena that we choose to play.

Danny Miller (1990) captured the essence of this phenomenon when he wrote of *The Icarus Paradox*. This occurs when members of organizations focus on their success so much that they fail. In their quest for success, they develop



competencies that help them succeed. People in the organization see the success and take it as evidence that their competencies (the organization's "fixed" abilities) are the keys to success. They over emphasize these competencies as critical to their success. But when they focus on applying their competencies over and over again instead of on continually learning and improving, those competencies can take on a life of their own. Members ignore feedback in favor of revering these cherished competencies. They should revere the efforts they put into learning from feedback to create their competencies more than they revered the competencies themselves.

It has been our experience that many of the most effective leaders have the ability to stand with one foot in each of the two awarenesses ... and keep standing there until the two positions become one. In so doing, we maximize the chances that our final decision embraces all, if not most, of the truths that can be found in either position.

But how can you know your consciousness? How can you know when you've frozen your consciousness and commensurately, your capacity for transformation?

As we mentioned earlier, most people know *that* they "think". It is so automatic and assumed that they fail to see the implications and impact of this fact on their lives and on what they do.

Although they know *that* they think, fewer people know *what* they think in any immediate moment. Even less own or are accountable for their experience and reactions to life's



events and the thinking behind it. The vast majority frequently blame others of the situation for how they feel or act. This is akin to writing a poison pen letter to yourself and not recognizing your handwriting.

Even more disillusioning, knowing how critical ones thinking has on one's quality of life, some people turn over their thinking to someone else. When this occurs, you hear statements like "Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." ... or "Tell me how I should be thinking" ... "just follow orders." Unfortunately, there are also managers in any system who reinforce this thinking of dependency in others. They fail to see the long-term debilitating effect it has on the individual as well as on the organization.

Why is acknowledging thought and thinking important? To the degree that you accept the premise that we are thinking beings and what we think determines our interpretation of the influence we attribute to the events and people around us ... is the degree to which we can maximize our response to achieve positive and constructive results. By owning and accepting the fact that our thinking is of our own creation, we then accept the potential to be able to alter our thinking in order to achieve more favorable results.

However, the volume and velocity of our thinking far outstrips our ability to intellectually keep pace. We think more voluminously and faster than our meager conscious mind can keep up.

To notice the quality of our thought in the moment, we also need to accept that our feelings in the moment reflect the



quality of that thought. There are times when we feel angry or troubled and there are times when we feel grateful and compassionate. Some mornings, we awaken in a good mood ... and other mornings when we don't want to get out of bed. Regardless, our feelings are like the dashboard for the quality of our thinking. Unfortunately, many of us have learned to ignore these feelings or to consciously try to change our feelings through clever affirmation. When we feel this way, very few of us acknowledge our feelings and how they influence how we see what is going on for us in the moment. We tend to categorize our feelings as good or bad ... helpful or disabling.

When we are caught in these familiar feeling, we find ourselves reacting in a habitual way. We don't allow ourselves the space to pause ... reflect ... and contemplate what is actually happening. When we do, we frequently see other alternatives that we haven't tried before.

As we developed our understanding of this phenomenon, we had the good fortune to meet and work with Stanford professor, Carol Dweck. She had just written her paradigm-breaking book *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success*. What she discovered that improved the effectiveness for the world of education, we saw a direct corollary to what the organizational world needed. Dr. Dweck and her colleagues were developing a competency that spoke to this deeper and more expansive level ... the level of "mindset". Within short order we realized that working at this level of mindset was to be the new "normal" for change. This one idea brought into focus what



and why we had built our business ... and where our understanding had stopped but has the potential to move to an even more profound level.

There was an instance that embodied much of what has been presented.

A few years ago, we were consulting to a large utility company. In the course of working with the senior team, the CEO called me in to see if I could assist his CFO to work better with the senior team as well as with the finance function in general.

The CEO felt that the CFO was a brilliant finance executive and a valued voice in strategic and competitive matters. He was a recognized thought leader in both the industry as well as in the discipline of finance. However, he was also a difficult person to work with. In many ways, he acted like a bully with the information that he possessed about the financial operation of the company. He created a combative, hostile work environment. On more than one occasion, he would address the rest of the team in a callous and condescending fashion. He would make demeaning comments and accusations in front of groups ... both large and small. In private, he would have politically disparaging discussions of other individuals behind their backs. It had gotten so bad that every member of the team had complained to the CEO about the CFO's volatility, politicizing criticalness and apparent lack of inclusion or respect.

Eventually, the way that this condition had manifested itself was in the lack of open and free flowing dialogue and



problem solving. Except for the individual relationship with the CEO, there was little trust or comradery as a team with each other.

The CEO had a number of conversations with the CFO but the suggestions would only have a temporary affect on the CFO's attitude and behavior. This was a conundrum for both the CEO and the CFO.

I agreed to meet with the CFO to find out if he was interested in truly exploring his reactions as well as his approach toward others.

When we first met, he seemed to have a sincere and honest curiosity about his role in the situation. There were times when he could see his contribution to the state of affairs. He could identify when his mindset yielded positive results and when they shut down communication and participation. Even when that happened, he felt that his insightful understanding of the situation could singularly carry the day. He started to see the role that his and other's thinking played in the outcome. He also started to notice the difference his thinking had on the receptivity and synergy of the team.

For the first few meetings, our conversations were both hospitable and mutual. The critical person that the CEO initially mentioned did not appear in any of our discussions.

Then one day, when I met with him, he was visibly agitated and accusatory. He didn't have time for our meeting and he dismissed our prior conversations as "psycho-babble". The only reason that he participated in our dialogues was because the CEO wanted him to.



To prove his point, he asked if I could comment on a situation that he had at home. This was going to be his “test” of the voracity of what we had been discussing.

A smirk came over his face when I told him that I was not a licensed therapist and family matters were well beyond my expertise.

He said that he didn’t want any advice or counselling only that he wanted to hear what I saw in the framework of what we had been discussing ... a “test” on whether or not we would continue meeting. I agreed to share my thinking with him but as a business consultant, not as a licensed psychologist or therapist.

We both agreed.

He shared that he had recently remarried. He had two sons from his previous marriage and he was given custody of them both. Both boys had a difficult time accepting his new wife as their mother. The younger boy has steadily withdrawn into himself into his private world of video games and quiet disobedience.

His older son was more combative and displayed his displeasure of his new mother outwardly. He was having a negative influence on his younger brother. His wardrobe had turned black, he stayed away from home late into the evening, his grades progressively suffered, and he left the home in a mess. His disobedience was more vocal and insulting to his new mother.

In response, the CFO chose to punish him until he straightened out and at least treat his new mother and the home with some respect.



The first thing that he did was he withdrew his permission for his son to play on the school baseball team. He knew that his son loved playing the sport and looked forward to being on the team and learning from the coach. His withdrawn permission made the point that there was a consequence to his son's attitude. Unfortunately, his son did not become more accepting of his new wife. His son became more sullen and non-communicative.

When that move did not yield the desired results, he took away the second thing that his son loved ... playing his guitar. His son would get lost in his music. It was an avenue for creativity and improvisation for his son. His son was talented. Again, by removing the guitar, it had an even more negative impact on his son's attitude.

On this day, the CFO received a frantic call from his new wife with an ultimatum ... either the eldest son goes to boarding school or she will leave the house. The CFO was heading home to basically read his son the "riot act".

The CFO then turned to me and asked what would I do?

I shared with him that I did not know what I would do were I in his shoes ... but, I could comment on what I heard.

A person's state of mind determines how much true "listening" and actual "hearing" occurs without reactionary response, anger or judgement. It is when a person is in this healthier perspective that the odds for a productive conversation increases.

On one level, in a culture of retribution and control, I can see where his actions made sense. However, rarely does



retribution restore one to health.

Fundamentally, there were two situations where his son was in a relatively healthy state of mind ... when he was playing baseball and when he was playing his guitar. Regardless of the reason and without adequate understanding of what was going on with his thinking, he took away his son's opportunity to experience these states of health. There wasn't enough contrast between his son's state of healthy functioning and when he was in an unhealthy state in order for his son to actually see the difference between the two states.

The CFO bristled and declared that he would NOT allow his son to go forward without paying some consequence for his actions. The CFO was building up a "head of steam" so that he could tell his son the hard truth that his going to a boarding school was completely his son's fault. After all, if his son was going to live under the roof he provided ... there were rules!

My response was that, I did not advocate ignoring the situation or trying to gloss it over. In some ways, not addressing the situation would be just as detrimental as addressing the situation poorly. If he wanted for any of his message to be heard in a healthy way, he needed to get into as calm and contemplative state as possible when he delivered his message. He needed to be as aware of his thinking as possible as well as minimize as much as possible those accusatory statements, feelings of hopelessness and disappointment in his son and the angry judgment he held. He needed to personally have the mindset that he wanted his son to have in order for his son to hear messages of hope, support and guidance from him.



In contrast, he needed to deliver his thoughts from a state of love and empathy for his son.

My words apparently made very little sense to him. I was summarily dismissed and I felt that this was the end of my engagement with the CFO. I found out about the rest of his drive home a week later when I cautiously met with the CFO at our next scheduled meeting.

He shared that most of the early drive home was miserable. As he drove, he was mumbling to himself as though he was rehearsing what he was going to say to his son and to his wife. He noticed the angry loop of thoughts he was entertaining and how irritated he was getting toward the traffic and toward other drivers on the road.

As he pulled into his driveway, he said that he was suddenly embarrassed in himself. It was his embarrassment that gave his cause for pause before getting out of his car. He did not storm into his house ... nor did he go to his son's bedroom and bang on the door. He knocked on the door instead and asked permission of his boy to talk with him.

He shared with his son about the influence that a healthy state (of mind) has on healing wounds, enjoyment of life and getting the results you want. He talked about the quality, pride, creativity, and enjoyment that he would see in his son's face whenever he played his guitar. He also saw that same enthusiasm when he was on the baseball field and being mentored by his coach. His son's demeanor during these times was an example of his son's health coming forward. That's why he loved playing the guitar and being on the baseball team.



He asked his son how he felt toward his baseball coach. He used his son's coach as an example of that type of leader who can bring out the best in others ... as a leader and as a parent.

He then took a step that I did not think possible. He asked his son to forgive him and to see if they could have a fresh start of things. They could not ignore what has occurred but they could change how they respond to life's events as they happen.

The CFO shared with his son that he was also on a similar journey of discovery and he apologized for not being the father he wanted to be. They talked about how the stress and tension was affecting the younger brother. Surprisingly, his older son voiced compassion and empathy for their stepmother and what she must be going through.

Instead of judgment and discipline, they reached an agreement of support both going forward as well as when they slipped into their old ways of thinking.

Within a few weeks, the CFO noticed that the home culture started to change. It became more peaceful and there were cautious ventures into more intimate conversations. There appeared to be more sensitive and honestly curious discussions of the evolution of their relationships. Even when someone slipped into their "old" ways, there was no longer the reactive anger, judgment or defensiveness that had marked their previous home life. They were open to experience more of life together ... family vacations, education opportunities, mutual experiences of self-awareness and talk therapy.

As the CFO was sharing that with me, it also dawned on him that his insights into his new consciousness started to



capture much of the reason why we were originally meeting. He started to clearly see how his thinking would get in the way of creating a healthy and productive relationship with the senior team and with his organization in general.

Can you see the wide-spread influence and impact that a healthy thriving mindset has on every element of one's life? What might be some of the dimensions that would benefit from this mindset in your world?

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Through Leadership Spirit International, Paul is dedicated to healthy, thriving servant-leadership in order to assist executives in unleashing the spirit behind their personal leadership as well as unleashing the collective spirit of their organizations. Paul currently lives in Marin County, California, with his wife Nancy and his immediate family.

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