



PRINCIPLE-BASED DIALOGUE:
A MODEL OF CONSULTING THAT APPLIES THE INSIGHTS OF
ROBERT K. GREENLEAF TO ORGANIZATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSCENDENT LEADERSHIP

—PAUL M. NAKAI
LEADERSHIP SPIRIT INTERNATIONAL

In the early 1980s one of my clients, Harry Bubb [past Chairman and CEO of Pacific Financial Companies], gave me a copy of Robert Greenleaf's book, *Servant-Leadership*. Harry and I would subsequently have long conversations about his view of corporate responsibility and leadership development; Greenleaf's words had struck a resonant chord with both of us. Harry felt that leadership was a fundamental state of mind—as important as any attitude, trait, displayed behavior or result achieved. Back then, I must admit, I did not fully understand his thinking, although I was mesmerized by his enthusiasm and his many ideas. In addition to exploring and learning *about* leadership and its many dimensions, he felt that effective leadership development had to include facilitating and providing the development candidates with an *experience* of the leadership state of mind. Unfortunately, unlike the certainty associated with being able to identify and analyze the various tangible dimensions and examples of leadership, the experience of this state could not be mandated or easily choreographed.

In addition to exploring leadership in the corporate and business environment, Harry spoke of exploring and experiencing leadership in other venues, for example the arts (music, painting, dance, etc.), the study of philosophy, the social settings of community and in other cultural societies. He felt that if the candidate could see beyond the various forms in which leadership manifested itself, he or she might be able to become aware of



this state of mind and the spirit of leadership from which every capacity and trait originated.

Harry was the first CEO with whom I had the opportunity to work who had this depth of understanding about leadership. Each of the leaders mentioned in this article shares a similar understanding of this dimension of life . . . an ability to live in the present and to anticipate the future. It is difficult to adequately describe their understanding since their experience of it is such a personal one. But if you have the opportunity to meet and converse with these leaders, you, as I, would be profoundly struck by their common sense, resilience, perspective, vision and sense of contribution.

Foresight is the "lead" that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only. They are not leading, but are reacting to immediate events, and they probably will not long be leaders.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

MY JOURNEY SINCE HARRY

For over twenty-five years, my professional life had been spent working with leaders who have tried to change and improve their organizations. For the most part, I assumed that we shared a common perspective and understanding about what it took to do this . . . that is, up to a few years ago, when I was once again reminded of those earlier conversations with Harry. Essentially, I understood that our approach was to design and implement a plan—craft a program for change that would effectively teach and reach the widest number of employees in the organization. We wanted to design the infrastructure, procedures and policies of the firm to direct and reinforce the desired behaviors and attitudes. In addition, we wanted participants to learn the new direction and expectations of the company. We wanted to teach them the behaviors and attitudes needed to achieve those new goals and to more effectively deal with the looming challenges facing the organization.



However, a few years ago, I realized that my assumption of what I saw as my role was a few degrees “off center.” In that moment, I became the student, and a small group of my client-executives became my mentors. They helped me view my actions and efforts from a different perspective and through the lens of a different understanding of human design and organizational change. As a result, this new awareness of organizational transformation and leadership development tremendously simplified our organizational change efforts, as well as making them more effective, less stressful, more flexible and ongoing, and more organic.

This is not to say that there were no more challenges or difficult times. . . in fact, far from it. But what I started to notice was how, in both prosperous as well as trying times, these leaders maintained their perspective and their resiliency, their connection with their people, their mission, and the welfare of the company. . . and their integrity with their values and spiritual underpinnings.

MY OLD CONSULTANT ROLE

Fundamentally, before my realization, I saw my role and the role of senior management as being one of leader, teacher and coach. Once the executive officers decided upon the vision, values and strategic direction for the firm, the job became one of educating the rest of the organization and convincing them to follow suit. Our measure of success was a function of how well we could present, teach and reinforce the new direction and cultural expectations that would “win over” the people. It was our job to *behaviorally* define and interpret this new spirit and vision for the people and to “help” them act accountably in this new paradigm of performance. Within my efforts to convince, support, direct and correct was the basic assumption that I could influence and change how people thought and felt about themselves, about their roles and responsibilities, and about their stance toward the company.

However, I was about to question the philosophical underpinnings of my actions. These questions led to a subtle shift in my attitude toward what



I did, how I supported my clients, and how I went about my job. It also offered me a new perspective that provided me with greater resiliency and fulfillment and enabled me to be more flexible and appropriate in what I was doing.

This paper is the result of my observations and experiences and the dialogues I had with five executives in five different companies. In their own way, they helped me see my efforts through a different lens. These executives are: Harry Bubb, CEO (ret.), Pacific Financial Companies, Newport Beach, California; Jim Hart, CEO, Senn-Delaney Leadership Consulting Group, Long Beach, California; Denny Litos, CEO, Ingham Regional Medical Center, Lansing, Michigan; Dave Roberson, CEO and President, Hitachi Data Systems, Santa Clara, California; and Ric Rudman, COO and EVP (ret.), Electric Power Research Institute, Palo Alto, California.

The reason I wanted to introduce you to these gentlemen is because I freely refer to the lessons that I learned from them throughout this paper. Here, then, are the insights they've given me about organizational transformation and transcendent leadership, followed by an introduction to a form of leadership consulting I call Principle-Based Dialogue, that has risen from these insights:

Realization #1

You cannot change how a person thinks and feels without their permission and agreement. . . . You cannot make a person think and feel the way that you want them to think and feel without their permission and agreement.

Ask yourself, can anyone make you think or feel the way that they want you to think and feel without your permission? You can work for a company or a boss where you are not allowed to share your thoughts or ask questions. But does that change what and how you think?

This idea surrounds us, but do we truly understand its implications? For instance, for those who live in the United States, one of the inalienable



rights of every citizen that was recognized by the architects of the Constitution is that of *Liberty*. The liberty that they wrote of especially applies to freedom of thought. This freedom of thought is at the root of our individual uniqueness and our capacity to choose as we see fit. It is the reason that we can freely interpret and experience events differently from others. Although at times we may take this for granted, notice what happens to us when someone tries to take it away or impose their will on our thinking without our permission.

This freedom of thought was made abundantly clear in Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was incarcerated in the most physically horrific and emotionally extreme situation, a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. Even the intensity of the event did not guarantee a common perspective or the same mental reaction from every individual in that predicament. His observation of this phenomenon formed the basis of the work that he explored after the war and subsequently wrote about in his book. Frankl implies that there is no magical dimension in any event, situation or person that dictates that everyone who experiences an event would see it absolutely the same way. This meant that there were no events that were *universally* seen by every person as wonderful or horrendous; and, there were no events that appealed to everyone in the same way. This meant that how an individual reacted to an event was very much a personal phenomenon of choice based on that person's thinking regarding that event.

The implications of this fact were that my experience of life and the events in my life were very much of my choosing, since the thoughts through which I viewed the event were of my making. Although at times and at certain moments, this was not obvious or evident to me, nonetheless, it was true. No person or event could *make* me feel or act a certain way unless I chose to agree to do so and/or I chose to give them permission to have that kind of influence over me.

Regardless of my good intentions, this fact flew in the face of my previous assumptions that through my professional efforts I could sculpt



and choreograph the thinking and awareness of others. . . and subsequently, their attitudes and actions. This realization had implications for me in every arena of life. . . as a change agent, as an organizational leader, as a parent and spouse, as a child, and as a sibling. As the recipient of this principle, I could no longer blame others or an event for how I felt or thought. Hearing myself think “They made me feel this way” or “I had no choice” no longer made any sense.

As a coach to executives, I began to notice the number of times my suggestions and designs were based on the assumption that we could make someone think or feel a certain way to enable them to achieve the desired result. I began to wonder: outside of these five executives, how many leaders go through life under the assumption that they can make their people think and feel a certain way? Perhaps, with effort, money and attention, these leaders may be able to control their people’s behavior and performance. . . but can these leaders control how their people think and feel without their people first giving them permission to affect their thinking? How much time and effort, how many resources are spent in this pursuit?

I understood this notion on an intellectual level. But in my conversation with Denny Litos, CEO of Ingham Regional Medical Center, my opinion and approach belied the idea that I was trying to choreograph and manipulate the thinking of the people to achieve a common goal or a healthier perspective. Regardless of the nobility of the purpose of my actions, they were based on a flawed understanding of how we are as human beings. Denny “gently” pointed this out to me. However, my conundrum was. . . if the mark of a leader is someone who gets things done through others, how, then, do they do this if they cannot control their people’s thinking? This becomes especially knotty when we are talking about embracing core values, treating each other more kindly, maintaining goodwill toward difficult people, raising the quality and service of our endeavors, staying focused on the goals, being open to change, and so forth. What was I truly doing in my efforts to support Denny’s desire to create a more values-based, healthy, high-performing organization?



As I observed Denny in a number of management situations, some of which were very harsh and adversarial, I started to get a glimpse of his thinking and consciousness. His understanding of this concept became evident to me through his resulting attitude toward the people in his hospital and toward his organization as a whole. Regardless of the intensity of the situation, he seemed to be weatherproofed against the “slings and arrows” that were being lodged toward him. He also appeared to personally weather quite well the performance-damaging storm of reduced census throughout the industry, low remuneration, and unwieldy regulatory requirements. The answer for me lay in his ability to see and value the dignity and, in most cases, the innocence of his people. One situation in particular stands out for me.

The hospital was in the middle of a heated contract negotiation with their union. Profanity, threats and accusations became a normal part of the conversation. After each exchange, the parties would return to their own area to discuss what was on the table. After one particularly adversarial session, the negotiating management team started to vent their frustrations, judgments and admonitions about the behavior they had just experienced coming from the union. In the midst of all this, Denny mentioned how proud he was to have union people like this working in his organization. It wasn't a ploy to calm down his management team, as his sentiments were authentic. He went on to say that in the midst of the insults and insinuations, he saw people who were willing to put their own welfare on the line for what they felt was the good of their constituents. They were committed to doing the “right” thing in their minds, even if it meant risking their personal well-being. He did not agree with their tactics or with their attitude, but he was proud of them for their courage and commitment. Through this perspective, he was able to get beyond the obvious to see possibilities that eventually led to a mutually agreeable solution.

All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by



mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 39)

Although you can anecdotally share an event, you cannot “teach” the consciousness or understanding that provided the perspective or insight that made such consciousness appropriate and poignant for the given situation. Without that consciousness, at best, you could try to duplicate the actions, but would miss the spirit and authenticity of the process. Through the experience with Denny, though, I started to understand what Denny meant and had a brief glimpse of what he saw. His efforts to create a healthier and more respectful organization were not about convincing people who did not want to be convinced. His efforts were not about coercing people to act in a way that they did not agree with, even if that way was more respectful and collaborative. Instead, his communicating his message over and over again and in many forms was an effort to find those individuals who already resonated with the intent, common sense, and truth of that message. It wasn’t as much an effort of teaching and convincing as it was an effort of discovery, reinforcement, and gaining permission to explore together. In his words, he wanted to find those people in the organization who were already living their lives by these healthy principles. . . . to find the “choir.” He wanted to find those individuals who already live their lives with this perspective and understanding. He wanted to appeal to those who see the common sense of the message and who want to explore it deeper.

Knowing that the more negative or cynical individual is oftentimes louder and more threatening, he wanted to make the organization a safer place for the members of the “choir” to step forward and assume a role of leadership. He wanted to be available to those who wanted counsel and to assist and guide the sincerely interested. But he knew that he could not make the sad and angry folks see life differently if they did not want to see life differently. He understood that because of their thinking, they would view every effort through the lens of anger, distrust, politics and selfishness. Until they could clear up some of their personal biases, his efforts



would be in vain. . . in fact, because they were viewed through these negative filters, his perceived efforts would most likely reinforce the very cynical state of mind that he was trying to diminish.

He was not looking for obedient or non-thinking “corporate soldiers.” He was looking for individuals who could align themselves with the mission, expectations, and values of the hospital. He wanted to awaken the individual healthy leadership within these people and to support their acting from it.

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 10)

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Denny's faith and hopefulness were founded on his understanding that the people in any organization fall along a continuum. They do not neatly fall into two binary camps, that is, they are not healthy or unhealthy, patient or impatient, hopeful and trusting, or cynical and distrusting. That would be naïve. However, he did see that the vast majority of people are cognizant and respectful of common sense and the feeling of goodwill. They are willing to be in on the journey as long as there is trust and respect.

The elements of his message are the basic realizations described in this paper. The first realization is that *every person has an innate freedom of choice regarding how he or she will think and feel*. Leadership recognizes this and acts in an appropriate fashion, both respectful and understanding of people. This does not mean that leadership should arbitrarily agree with what people see, nor that they should allow disruptive and disrespectful behaviors to continue, regardless of how many people hold that point of view. Leadership and all who choose to exercise their common sense and



positive relating can find perspective, wisdom, and solace in this understanding. The source of Denny's apparent confidence, patience, and faith about his people was at the heart of my second realization.

Realization #2

*People have an intrinsic sense of conscience, good will and well-being.
At our core is an innate appreciation and desire for peacefulness, contribution, health, kindness and love.*

Inevitably when starting a new program, I will be warned by people about the meanness or harshness of a particular person I am about to meet. This caution is often shared with me for my welfare and to prepare me for an expected unpleasant event. However, in almost every situation, the person I have met has been cordial, respectful and collaborative. "Attila the Hun" fails to appear. After our time together, at the most, these individuals may not agree with the possibility of a healthier environment; but in every situation, they agree with the intent and desire. They may feel that our perspective is naïve or that it is unfounded in reality. But they cannot deny that in their most private moments, they have a deep appreciation for authenticity and goodwill.

In fact, in many cases, if you explore deeply enough, behind every action taken, you will find at its core a sincere desire and motive for greater peacefulness, making a positive contribution, advancing kindness and respect, and so forth. Where we tend to fall short is in the mechanism, decision or behavior taken that is meant to achieve this intention. This would be akin to the boss who constantly yells, chides and berates people to produce so that they are secure in their jobs. Another example would be the manager who uses shame, guilt and obligation to get his people to feel gratitude and appreciation for their positions. The action or solution may be aberrant and may be a flawed example of the motive or desire, but it does not negate the healthiness of the motive or desire.

Again, this deeper realization came from the time I spent with Denny.



Because this state of health already exists, he felt that our efforts were not to teach anyone goodness or the healthy way of being.

In truth, our efforts were to help awaken and uncover what was already there. Our process was not one of “pouring in” the right answers, but one of bringing forth the common sense and wisdom that were already resident in every person. Instead of teaching, entertaining and convincing our audience, our efforts took on a more dialogic and conversational feeling. There was more time for personal reflection and exploration. Instead of building camps of who “got it” and who didn’t, there was a mutuality of understanding that we are all on a similar journey. At any given time, we just happen to be on different parts on the path moving forward at different speeds. Many of the people saw this journey as a normal and natural way of life that they could easily access. It wasn’t reserved for a chosen few, but was the purview of every person. For these individuals, our efforts were no longer a program that was being implemented, but a way of life that was ongoing and deepening.

However, the reality is that there are a number of disillusioned and upset people. If we are all innately healthy and loving, why is there such discord and anger around us? Once you see this innate aspect of human beings, you can then see the influence of one’s conditioned personal thinking that gets in the way of our natural way of being. If we could allow ourselves to relax this ego and memory-based thought, we would start to hear our own divine wisdom speak. The journey would be to return to being able to trust the healthier thoughts within, as intensely as one had learned to trust the thoughts of disappointment and hurt. As one of my mentors once shared with me:

Your wisdom is always speaking to you . . . but it speaks in whispers. The reason you can’t hear it is because you have a brass band of your personal thinking playing in your mind. The fact that you can’t hear it does not mean that it’s silent. Your job is to quiet down the band so that you can hear this more pleasant, wiser voice.



Knowing this, you can see how we all lose our way at times. However, knowing that lost-ness is innocence, you can weatherproof yourself a little more easily.

Again, Denny displayed this capacity during the labor strike. After everything was said and done and the negotiations had been completed, the one thing that he chose to speak on at his management meeting was the notion of forgiveness—forgiveness not as something that could be demanded of anyone in the room, but as insight and perspective. He said that forgiveness was very much a selfish act of attending to one’s own healthier state of mind; forgiveness keeps one from bitterness and anger. Forgiveness had nothing to do with condoning or pardoning disrespectful or unhealthy acts, but was a state of mind that you returned to once you could see the innocence of thought in others (and yourself). It would be through this state of forgiveness that management could provide the leadership to bring the hospital back to the healing and loving community it needed to be. Because it was so much a part of a personal journey of discovery, Denny understood that it may take some a little more time to reach this state. In addition, he stated that he did not want anyone to act contrary to their feelings out of guilt or obligation and that his words were more for the group’s welfare than for anything to do with the hospital. Their actions had to be authentic and in integrity with their spirit and their heart.

It wasn’t an easy concept to grasp, especially in the midst of all of the leftover angst and accusations. However, the following day, a number of the managers were at the entrances to the hospital welcoming back the striking employees. By some returning employees, these managers’ actions were viewed with skepticism and judgment. From the perspective of many more employees, their actions were very much appreciated and formed the basis for a new relationship.

The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person’s effort or performance as good



enough. . . . Acceptance of the person, though, requires a tolerance of imperfection. Anybody could lead perfect people—if there are any.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 20)

Being able to see this innate capacity for health does not mean that one is blindly optimistic. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Although this capacity is ever-present, there are moments when we do not display much maturity. Often our personal, ego-based thinking seems to get in the way of our being more open to healthier thoughts. Under the guise of being realistic and pragmatic, we allow doubt, fear and insecurity to govern too much of our decisions and actions. Understanding oneself in order to help gain perspective follows.

Realization #3

Regardless of our ability to notice it, our consciousness and awareness is in a constant state of flux at every moment in our life. Our feelings can be fleeting and changing and, at times, we notice that we live and perceive our lives as an “outside-in” phenomenon, and sometimes as an “inside-out” phenomenon.

All five executives noticed that on certain occasions they and their people felt helpless or victim to the whim of life’s forces. They felt their inner state of well-being or the feelings they experienced as caused by the events happening around them. When the world looks this way, you often hear statements like “He makes me feel this way” or “I had no control of the matter.” At its worst, when individuals see life this way, they are in a constant struggle to change their surroundings, to change how others behave, or to drive to achieve certain results in order to feel a greater sense of control. However, when taking time to reflect, we recognize that our desire to control results in only a fleeting, fragile, even false sense of peace. This is the outside-in life: when we are driven by our surroundings or when we fuse our inner state of mind to events and people around us.

At other times, leaders noticed that their inner state of well-being and



perspective had nothing or very little to do with their surroundings. Rather, quite often, the leaders with whom I work noticed that they had the ability to remain calm and present even in the harshest and most hectic situations. Instead of being reactive, or affected by the events around them in a chaotic way, they brought greater perspective to the situation. Even when others thought they were under “attack,” these leaders brought to the moment compassion and understanding instead of defensiveness, rigidity, or the attempt to control. Instead of reactionary responses that pushed people away, the leaders brought acceptance and collaboration. Instead of an unyielding “party line,” they focused on the spirit they wanted to create. Instead of disengaging from others, they stayed connected and inclusive, able to maintain an ego-detached engagement. They saw life as an inside-out existence and, through their thinking and action, created a mature and compassionate interpretation of life’s events.

With this understanding of how people experience life at any given point in time, these leaders saw their people being at various points on the continuum. They then tried to awaken more and more people to a personal journey of moving from an outside-in existence to an inside-out existence. This is a higher form of *accountability*, i.e., being accountable for our experience of life versus being victim of the events of life. This is not to say we are accountable for every event that happens, but we can be accountable to our thinking and what we make of the events of life. Commensurately, our actions and responses are often a result of our perceptions and can be more or less appropriate and significant, depending on the quality of our thinking.

A common trait these leaders shared was a healthy attitude toward their performance and how they responded to the various challenges and situations placed before them. Although they acknowledged that there were external events as well as other people who had an influence on what they were able to accomplish, they were not helpless victims of these circumstances. They did not blame others or make excuses for their circumstances or lack of results. They did not make their happiness or fulfillment contingent on others or how things turned out. Rather, the leaders displayed the



ability to recognize and accept the current “reality” and to build on this starting point. The decisions made and the actions taken were founded on a deeper innate sense of fulfillment and contribution.

This stance toward life put leaders on a journey of discovering how they could have a greater and more profound impact and leverage on the world around them. They became ardent students of the laws of contribution, stewardship and service. Each step of the way required a healthy respect for (and comfort with) the more intangible realms of life, such as insights and revelations, vision and inspiration, and values and ethics. Like most of us, these leaders strove to make progressive sense out of life.

This was an especially poignant insight for Jim Hart, CEO of Senn-Delaney Leadership Group. His professional journey has been one of progressively enabling and implementing positive and recursive change both for his organization and for the clients his organization serves. His unfolding understanding has brought him to a shift in mindset and thought process. Be the goal enhanced leadership ability, higher quality, or cultural transformation, to focus only on the objective to be achieved and then to drive to that outcome avoids tapping into the tremendous individual and collective potential of the people in the organization. An overly controlling and one-dimensional approach to change may appear at first to be the easier and most direct course to take. However, those of us who have tried this approach realize that, even if it is initially successful against early metrics, the innovation and flexibility needed to sustain and further real change still remain in the hands of one person or, at best, in the hands of a very small group of leaders. All too often, management begins to notice that once they relax their focus on or efforts toward the desired change, the old cultural inertia re-emerges, and performance and the rate of change slowly wane. There is little, if any, shift in attitude, identity and thinking on the part of those responsible for changing, even as they go through the mandated motions. More energy, effort and resources become necessary to keep the flywheel of change spinning. Eventually, this defeats or marginalizes any intended economy, productivity or innovation.



In speaking with Jim, I learned that he believes the real challenge is not so much to sustain change through external mechanisms and protocols, but to awaken in people their own capacity to personally shift their thinking and mindset in such a way that, to them, it makes sense to act and perform in a new paradigm. As Jim states, “The challenge is not in changing one’s thinking . . . the challenge is in keeping one’s thinking changed.”

The common concept toward which these leaders all lead is the concept of greater *accountability*. Their understanding of this concept exceeds how this notion is used in normal day-to-day conversations. Because of heightened awareness, these leaders have had an indelible impact on the world around them.

Being accountable has often been used synonymously with being responsible. Accountability has also been construed as having a “no whining,” “make things happen,” and “get on with it” characteristic. Yet a too-quick understanding limits the efficacy of this notion for many leaders. For the executives in this study, accountability is a much “bigger” notion. More than being accountable for one’s performance, how one acts and behaves, or more importantly for one’s attitude, true accountability recognizes the fact that at times one will feel vulnerable, dependent, or victimized, and that this is part of being alive and a result of our thinking. Our capacity to see both the content of our thinking, that is, *what* we think, as well as the process of thought, that is, *that* we think, provides the necessary perspective. With this view, we purposefully choose not to spend a tremendous amount of time in poor states of mind.

In addition to being accountable in the world of form (structures, strategies, etc.) and tangible results, accountability also embraces a more spiritual world that precedes the world of form. Accountability rises from the world of positive change, “fresh starts,” transcendent ideas, forgiveness and innocence, inspiration and heightened service. That accountability is a state of mind is one of the “simple truths” with which these leaders live their lives. However, like many “truths,” accountability is difficult to convey to



others. In addition to communicating our understanding to others, this state of mind is demonstrated through insight, action, and behavior.

Realization #4

Life is constantly revealing itself to us on multiple plains and dimensions. The effective leader is cognizant and adept in each dimension and does not limit him/herself to only a few of these planes of revelation. In addition to focusing on the performance, results, behaviors and attitudes which are a manifestation of healthy leadership, effective leaders also try to awaken to their own state of wisdom, spirit and common sense from whence these ideas were formed.

The most effective leaders live life simultaneously on many different levels. Their experience of life exists in these many dimensions. They move comfortably and effortlessly from the tangible to the intangible and back again. They apply the same understanding of accountability to each of these levels. As such, they are open to and consider many forms of input upon which to make their decisions and to set their direction. Input includes objective performance and its contributing variables, noticing the obvious as well as the subtle in how people behave and act, sensing others' biases, prejudices and emotional predilections. . . and being receptive to creative, transcendent thoughts and insights which completely reinvent the life they live.

A simple way of describing these dimensions can be seen in the following diagram of concentric circles. Here are some broad observations of the inter-relationship of the dimensions.

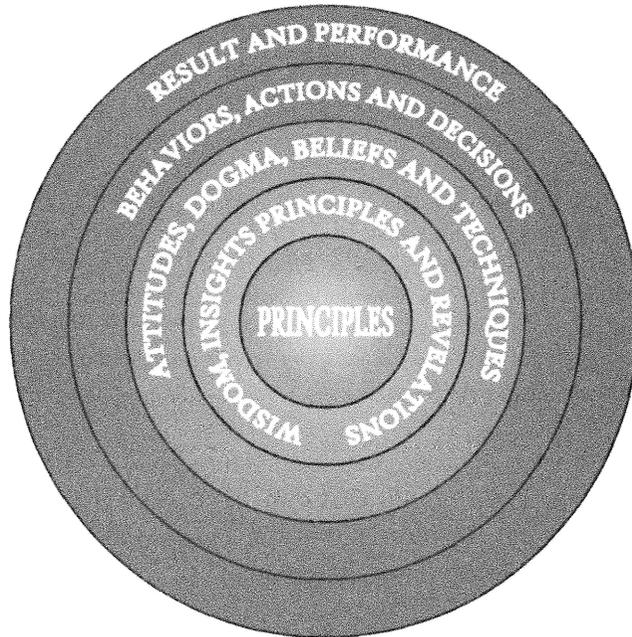


DIAGRAM 1

As the leader moves from the outer rings toward the center, the variables of each level become less and less tangible, measurable and definite. The leader is as comfortable working in the tangible world as she or he is maneuvering in the world of ideas, concepts and philosophy. In many ways, such leaders simultaneously see both tangible and intangible. . . objective and subjective. . . as being different shades of “form” and reality. Inspiration, compassion and forgiveness are as “real” as the chair you are sitting in at this moment. Conceiving of tangibles and intangibles in a unified way is one reason why these leaders have a strong, if not overly defined, vision directing them. Their relationship with their vision is as though it is already a reality on the physical plane. As they pursue the journey, they apply form to their sense of tomorrow as though it already exists today.

The more adept a leader is at living and operating at the more central



core levels, the more impact and leverage the leader has on the outer rings. For instance, changing one belief often has an impact on multiple attitudes, behaviors and results. Deeper still, a deep insight can often totally alter one's life and everything in it. Leaders have the capacity to move from the spiritual (principles) through the psychological (beliefs and attitudes) to the behavioral in achieving results. . . and back again.

Starting with the more tangible level, the leaders I worked with were practical and pragmatic stewards of their organizations. Constantly aware of their own results and performance and the real and potential influences on the welfare of the organization, they are accountable for organization-wide results and realize the organization's performance is a manifestation of variables that fall within their control and influence. They don't over-focus on events and situations that arise; rather, they focus on *how* they want to deal with such issues and challenges. They feel that a viable and profitable organization is one of the greatest ways to be of service both to employees and employees' families, and to the community the organization serves. Through their personhood and deep service, they ensure an ongoing and meaningful contribution.

The leaders I worked with realize very little happens until someone makes a decision and a commitment to do something. In order to achieve what they are charged to achieve in a healthy and perpetuating fashion, they also realize *decisions* and choices need to be made, and *actions* need to be taken. Such decisions and *behaviors* either contribute to or take away from performance. A thought is just a thought until it is converted into action. Without legitimate action steps, leadership is like a sun that never shines. . . tremendous potential but no results.

Continuing the journey inward, leaders realize decisions do not happen in a serendipitous or haphazard way. At times, decisions and actions are based on existing logic. . . a tried and true way of thinking and looking at the world. Existing logic is captured by *attitudes* toward life, *beliefs* about how things are (were), *dogma* and rules we live by, and through the *techniques* we apply to remind ourselves of the "right" way to do things. This



level is even less tangible than that of decisions, behaviors, and actions, and in some ways, of greater impact because of the wide range of situations to which existing thought patterns apply.

However, with changing times, sometimes the old answers no longer continue to work, or work at the level at which they once did. Instead of stubbornly and doggedly trying to apply yesterday's logic to today's issues, leaders display a deep respect for the capacity for innovative *insights* and *revelations*. When the leaders I dialogued with found themselves getting bogged down on an issue, they were able to detach, gain perspective, change their thinking about the topic, and subsequently reframe their perceptions. Doing so, they transcended the "old" thinking found at the level of beliefs, memories and dogma. Separating fact from imagination in this way and responding to the facts as much as possible requires not only a different way of doing things, but also the vision, flexibility and consistency to make it a reality. At this level of understanding we find a certain aliveness and freshness in our actions and, commensurately, in the organization.

As leaders, then, we find tremendous value in relaxing our existing thinking, and simply reflecting. Depending on the individual, reflection is accomplished through long morning walks, rounds of golf, free-flowing conversations and dialogue, or just quietness. The moment of insight cannot be called upon at will, but creating the scenario for openness in our minds is a necessity if it is to appear. The reflection activities are not seen as the cause of insight or of relaxation, but when we can suspend our personal thinking and biases, we become more open to the voice of wisdom.

[F]rom one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then govern one's life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. Such a view gives one the perspective that makes it possible for one to live and act in the real world with a clearer conscience.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

At their deepest core, authentic leaders understand and accept the belief that



much of their wisdom and perspective is rooted in their understanding of spiritual *principles*. Wisdom, goodwill, compassion, vision, and other traits and capabilities are a result of these principles. Leadership capacity does not simply happen in a serendipitous and haphazard fashion. There is *source and intelligence* behind our capacities. . . there is universal wisdom.

Realization #5

At the root of all of transcendent leadership capabilities and concepts are key Principles that manifest themselves through Thought, Consciousness and the Voice of Wisdom.

I started this article sharing a story about my relationship with Harry Bubb. This was not the only experience I had of Harry's leadership. During his tenure, he led the cultural and strategic transformation of the corporation from a mutual insurance company to a conglomerate of financial service offerings. Revenue and profits rose exponentially with the organization's growth. However, in his final years as the CEO and Chairman of the now Pacific Financial Companies, he realized some wide-range and dramatic changes needed to occur in order to put the corporation on sounder footing.

I am sure that, like anyone else, he would have preferred a "hero's farewell" for all he had captained. However, the two overriding thoughts governing his last two years were to leave a fiscally sound organization positioned for the future and to personally take whatever "heat" was involved in the restructuring instead of leaving it to a successor to bear. This way, the next CEO would be able to continue the corporate journey with a relatively clean slate with the people. Harry led the challenging and often difficult task of restructuring and reorganizing divisions, shedding less profitable operations, downsizing where necessary, and changing divisional leadership when appropriate. When Harry did retire, although there was a great deal of appreciation, recognition and best wishes, he realized those sentiments had been dampened by the activities of the previous two years. However, in talking with him, it was clear that his integrity as a



leader was intact and his conviction toward the organization's and the peoples' legacy was sound. His actions and decisions were in alignment with what he personally felt was "right," from a vulnerable, not an ego-driven perspective, and his ideas and feelings came not only from his strong values, but also from his developing interpretation of those values through his own insights and understanding of spiritual principles.

What I have come to understand is that spiritual principles are the source of every facet of leadership and life as we know it. An authentic understanding and experience of spiritual principles enables us to travel the continuum from being able to change our minds to being able to truly forgive. Spiritual principles—grace, ease, compassion, responsibility, forgiveness, love—are *gifts* enabling us to experience all of life. . . the good and the bad, the peaceful and the troubling, the happy and the sad. Such principles provide us with vision and foresight, courage and compassion, resiliency and perspective, a deeper conscience and morality. They supercharge our efforts and bring to life everything that we've ever learned. In fact, as valuable as the *content* of insights can be to our personal performance and fulfillment, the greater capacity is our ability to *have* insight and transcendent thoughts. This, too, is a capability born from spiritual principles.

These principles point to a state *before* "form" and, as such, defy being defined or adequately communicated using the artifacts of form, that is, through words or actions. Words and actions become our primary mechanisms, but remain woefully inadequate in capturing and articulating the simultaneous nature of life and the limitless potential and mystery of existence. Regardless, spiritual principles are the source of our experience of life as we perceive it. They engage us in our capacity to be aware of life through our own level of *Consciousness* at a given time. They provide the conduit that binds the events of our life, our perception of those events and the subsequent actions we take through *Thought*. And, through our capacity for insight, spiritual principles provide a source of common sense and tran-



scendent universal *Wisdom*. From this understanding, hope, contribution, fulfillment and possibility are infinite.

Communicated through my own limited grasp, the principles are at the foundation of this entire treatise. Like most of this article, when the topic of leadership is discussed and defined it is predominantly described by the artifacts we see coming from a given state of mind, that is, the traits, characteristics and attributes of a leader, the abilities, capabilities and skills displayed, the results achieved and the challenges overcome. However, to define leadership in this manner merely talks *about* leadership through the form a given style of leadership takes. Defining leadership does not fully capture what leadership is, in that most often we do not include the source of leadership as part of the dialogue. The examples we point toward are merely the echoes of the voice of universal wisdom, once or twice removed from the source.

The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable. Leaders know some things and foresee some things which those they are presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 21)

An understanding and consciousness of the principles awakens our leadership capacity. Wisdom is a potential available to everyone. Leaders who lead from wisdom lead in a very natural and normal manner. Their specialness does not come from arrogance, notoriety or one-upmanship, but from being the one of the most “normal” of everyone and living their lives from a profound common sense. Such leaders hold a special place in the hearts and admiration of those around them. For instance, one of the leaders upon whom this article is based is seen as the spiritual hub of the organization and has consistently displayed the uncanny ability to be able to clearly see what the future will bring. Another is held in the highest regard because of his impeccable sense of ethics, his tremendous humility, and his deep and abiding concern for the people in his organization and for the community



they serve. And yet another is admired because of his ability to attract and develop leaders of character, vision and impact. These are but three examples of how their understanding is manifested.

What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civilization in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of individuals that are born of inspiration. Perhaps only a few will receive this inspiration (insight) and the rest will learn from them. The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, derives from more than usual openness to inspiration. . . .But the leader needs more than inspiration. . . .A leader initiates, provides the ideas and the structure, and takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 14)

Although not many people can be or want to be a successful CEO of a large organization, everyone has the potential to be a leader. In order for this to occur, I believe there are three basic elements in the development of our leadership capacity. The first step is to awaken to your own voice of wisdom, the spirit, the state of knowing in yourself. The second step is the manifestation and articulation of your voice—to put into form this formless spirit. Leadership is a personal choice directed by love, contribution and gratitude. The third step is to awaken others to their own unique voice. This, I believe, is the essence of leadership.

One name that does not appear on the list of leaders early in this article is that of Nancy Nakai, my wife. She is an accomplished professional, a founding member of several non-profit organizations, has served on numerous women's advocacy boards and has chaired successful fund raisers. She does not lead a multimillion-dollar organization with thousands of people reporting to her. However, I can think of no greater leadership than what she displayed in the raising of our children and the shepherding of our family. For the past 30 years, Nancy has displayed every leadership trait I've described. She has shown courage, hopefulness and determination. She has held a compelling vision for herself, for our family and for our community. She has had to make the tough calls whenever necessary, often alone



because of my travel regimen. She has also been a support when needed, a wonderful teacher and role model, and a consistent voice in the awakening of wisdom and spirit, both in our kids and in me. Her leadership is as poignant and contributing as that of any world or corporate leader. Her vision and choices are governed by her deep and abiding love and gratefulness for life. In short, she has met the criteria of true leadership.

The leadership of trailblazers . . . is so “situational” that it rarely draws on known models. Rather it seems to be a fresh creative response to here-and-now opportunities. Too much concern with how others did it may be inhibitive.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 34)

Nancy has been an example to me of the type of leadership the CEOs in this article hope to awaken within their organizations. Once people have awakened into confidence and wisdom, how they manifest leadership is governed by what they love or are grateful for . . . the nurse who loves nursing, the sales person who loves being of service, the professor who loves exploration and revelation, the doctor who loves healing, the researcher who loves the environment, the leader who loves the mission of and people in the organization. In fact, at the heart of every compelling vision is an abiding sense of gratitude, contribution and love. The third step, awakening spirit in others, is the final word.

I became intensely aware of this fact in my conversations with the Greenleaf Center for Servant-leadership. At first I noticed the Center did not have a Center-approved organizational consulting arm which presented an “authorized” definition of servant-leadership. They relied on a number of mechanisms for the dissemination of the message of servant-leadership, including higher education, resource material, the Center itself, corporate client organizations, and their Speakers Bureau. At first, I wondered why there had not been a centralized program or consulting service offering based on the ideas coming from the Center.

I now believe this had occurred by design. The mystery and wisdom



behind servant-leadership is only partially in the content and the words. The real magic is the infinite *spirit* and *consciousness* toward which the words point. From the outside looking in, I believe the Center's mission is to continually develop and communicate as much the *spirit* of servant-leadership as it is to develop and communicate the message and content coming from that *spirit*. Imagine you had a leadership academy with the brightest and most profound leadership thinkers and teachers as your agents. Imagine having an instructional group comprised of the likes of Danah Zohar, Margaret Wheatley, Peter Block, Warren Bennis, Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Jim Kouzes, Joseph Jaworski, Peter Senge, and Max Depree. The Center has had the wisdom to nurture and respect the *spirit* and understanding from which emerged the content of their thoughts and conclusions. Larry Spears, and those who work with him at the Center, saw the common thread that tied it all together and did not try to control how that "thread" became manifest in the world. I believe maturity is not controlling the conclusions, but honoring the state of wisdom and genius from which those conclusions have come to light.

The hope of Principle-Based Dialogue is similar: not to teach the one "right" way through manipulation or coercion, but to awaken in others a lasting understanding of servant-leadership, personally and professionally. Although Principle-Based Dialogue cannot guarantee insight, based on past results, and with the permission of the leader, it can lead one to the threshold where insight is possible. That final step is always the individual's choice to make.

Early on I made a distinction between wisdom and scholarship; and the former, what works well in practice, has long been my central interest. This is not to denigrate scholarship. It has its place, and there is a subtle interaction between the two, but they are different things. The wise are not necessarily scholars, and the scholars are not necessarily wise.

—Robert K. Greenleaf (1977, p. 1)

There is no mandate to apply or implement the lessons of servant-leadership. Rather, hope exists that the spirit of servant-leadership will be awak-



ened in more and more leaders. I believe this is at the heart of servant-leadership becoming more of a way of life versus something to implement. Once this spirit is ignited, a prescriptive approach becomes unnecessary. But what is the conduit to a servant-leadership state of mind that goes beyond all interpretations and conclusions? Though it's impossible to actually cause this state to occur, a servant-leadership way of being can open others' readiness through effective deep listening.

Realization #6

More valuable than obedient, dutiful and good followers are effective listeners, conscious thinkers and leaders of action.

One common emphatic statement attributed to the executive leaders in this essay is their ability to bring out the very "best" in their people. This vote of appreciation and confidence was evident in every conversation. Not only did their people enjoy performing at their optimal level, but they were also open to learning and pushing their horizons well beyond the status quo.

A litmus test of this type of effective leadership was articulated by Robert Greenleaf in *Servant-Leadership* (1977, pp. 13-14):

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?

In my experience, the leaders described in this article share a common perspective—they realize what they can control and what they can influence. In contrast, there are very few people who see the illusion of control for what it truly is. Many people believe tight control and lock-step discipline are the keys to organizational success. In other words, there is one "right" answer and it comes from senior management. All problems and chal-



allenges can be defined and resolved through this “right” answer, and thus it needs to be obeyed in its most complete definition.

Although I’ve taken an extreme description of this form of leadership, if you accept the fallacy of control, the resulting stance insures anarchy and a scattered laissez-faire attitude rather than alignment and velocity. Knowing what you can change, what you can influence, what you can only awaken, and what you should leave alone requires a level of wisdom that transcends the mechanistic, command and control network of thoughts. In many cases, the only time a leader knows she or he has chosen the right path is “after the fact.” Leadership does not easily lend itself to prescriptively setting a goal and stubbornly driving to that goal.

Leadership requires more listening than telling. In fact, it harkens a heightened form of listening that is deeply discerning, beyond the content of the words and ideas that are being communicated. Listening allows us to be more truly in the moment more of the time. Listening gives the capacity and wisdom to choose the path or opportunities that will lead to the greater good, and away from myopically following a false path previously established.

Only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first. . . .It is because true listening builds strength in people. . . .The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves first: Are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? Remember that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, “Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand.”

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 17)

Organizationally, this understanding shows up in many ways. For instance, at Hitachi Data Systems (HDS), recognizing the frequent and rapid global changes in technology, regulations, and industry competition, as well as the changes that occur within the larger corporate entity itself, Dave Roberson, President and CEO, realized that tight control was not an



organizational or leadership option. More importantly, over-control was contrary to Dave's understanding and expectations of life and people. Dave is a purposeful and definite leader of his company and he recruits and hires leaders in their own right. As such, he expects healthy and visionary leadership in return.

He also realized that in order for HDS to stay ahead of all of the changes, both real and projected, he needed a flexible, dynamic, and accountable corporate culture which is committed to being a continually "learning and leading" organization. He needed leaders who could readily tap into their capacity to see emerging opportunities and priorities and to rapidly institute the necessary changes and actions. All this he wanted to occur within the charter and mission of HDS. He and the senior team continue to heighten and expand their understanding of their role and their mission. But the "magic" is not in the actions they take, but in the level of thinking or understanding they share.

Dave is a tremendously incisive and aware listener. Although he has strong opinions and views about how the company can run well, when it's appropriate he has the ability to set his convictions aside and to listen openly to those around him. This trait is engaged with his people as much as with his clients. He listens intuitively. He notices that quality decisions and actions start with our ability to increase the quality and depth of the intake. In addition, people find that when they are with Dave, their thinking becomes clearer. When they encounter him, they don't spend tremendous energy being concerned about Dave's reactions, because his listening-based questions and demeanor evoke their "best" self.

Through the insight of listening, Dave decided that in order to create the "learning and leading" organization, the accountability for "51%" of the learning needed to fall on the learner (the listener) and not the teacher (the broadcaster). Although organizationally HDS consistently seeks out different ideas and perspectives, they never veer very far from this focus. As such, deep listening has become one of the cornerstones for effective leadership at Hitachi. Dave's team listens to each other with the sincere desire



to personally understand the depth of what is being shared, as well as noticing the feelings attached to a person's point of view. To listen openly means one has to suspend biases for as long as possible in order to hear the grains of truth the conversation is mutually built upon. Interestingly enough, those who have the ability to listen this way are the most incisive and global in their thinking. Their learning curve is steep, and their capacity for execution is high.

In contrast, in many other organizations, most, if not all, conversations are experienced in people through a filter of prejudices and biases instead of in openness and a sincere desire to learn and develop a new perspective. Prejudices and biases cause us to judge the speaker or the content of what is being shared, severely limiting the amount that can openly be discussed and exchanged.

The biased listener's discomfort with or confusion about the conversation becomes a barrier to be avoided. This is especially true when a new paradigm or perspective is surfacing. In organizations of biased listeners (or, in effect, non-listeners), the messages tend to get watered down or purposely vague. Because prejudices are a result of what we already know, we limit the ability to explore and consider new ideas and perspectives beyond how we currently see the world. In these organizations, the onus of the learning falls on the speaker's ability to maneuver around the maze of personal prejudices, any one of which could stop the listening and learning process entirely.

To Dave and his team, the starting point is the ability to listen with curiosity, openness and possibility. This is not to say that feelings of discomfort, confusion and disagreement are ignored. However, through Dave's leadership, these feelings are viewed not through the lens of "right and wrong," but more as an indicator that new ideas are being discussed. Difficult feelings are an indicator that the team is expanding the envelope of their thinking and may be entering new territory. By setting up this atmosphere, Dave has created a team that builds decisions on common sense and alignment rather than on a foundation of obligation, disagreement and sepa-



rateness. The decisions and actions occur more quickly and are more in concert with each other. People are more open to new ways of doing things and are equally adept at discerning the appropriate and meaningful actions that should be taken from those that are reactive and trivial.

I hasten to add that this team trait is far from lemming-like “group think.” Rather, the focus is not on obedience or even consensus around content, but on an alignment of understanding. Discussions are disciplined and lively and, through listening, each leader is expected to manifest the lessons and direction in the fashion that best serves his or her organization and maintains authenticity. In this way, Dave has attracted a cadre of strong global leaders around him. With very little difficulty, many of his “direct reports” could successfully run organizations as competent chief executives.

As with all of the leaders highlighted in this essay, I look forward to each of my regular conversations with Dave. I must admit that at times, the intensity of Dave’s listening and his capacity to be truly in the moment can be unnerving when my focus and presence is distracted. However, in every case, within short order, I find myself being drawn into the conversation and entertaining insights and perspectives I would not have previously considered. This realization around listening is but one result of Dave’s journey of insight and common sense. He, like others, has awakened his capacity for insights that transcend the present. The profundity of his decisions and actions is a result of the clarity and wisdom he experiences.

Although my relationships with each of these leaders differ, there is a common thread in each engagement: a relationship I have referred to as Principle-Based Dialogue.

PRINCIPLE-BASED DIALOGUE

The vast majority of people read, study, and listen for relevance. They search for content, for form, for actions that can be taken, and for results that can be achieved. However, their decisions about what is worthy of learning are often based on what they already know, that is, a perspective



based on their existing points of view. How is it possible, then, that anything truly “new” can be learned? In addition, how can one choose the correct decision from the seemingly unlimited options available?

Without the capacity for new insight, one would be destined to “live the same day 365 times a year.” The ability to consistently access the capacity for transcendent thought is the central core of effective leadership. However, throughout this essay, I’ve been pointing to something that cannot be mandated or caused to happen . . . definitely not by an outside influence. At the most, the external influence and the words of explanation used can only get the leadership candidate to the threshold of a transcendent leadership state of mind. The final, all-important step occurs in the candidate.

Once something “new” is discovered and experienced, there is a noticeable shift in how an individual sees the world and the possibilities and opportunities that lie before the individual. Often, it is not something that we plan for or choreograph, but we do notice it after the fact. We notice it in the results that we achieve, in the paths that we have taken, in the decisions we make, in the developing quality of our relationships, in our feelings of contribution and fulfillment and in the increased clarity of our life’s vision.

As one sets out to serve, how can one know that this will be the result? . . . Perhaps one chooses the same hypothesis again and again. But it is always a fresh open choice. And it is always a hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. Faith is the choice of the nobler hypothesis. Not the noblest; one never knows what that is. But the nobler, the best one can see when the choice is made. Since the test of results of one’s actions is usually long delayed, the faith that sustains the choice of the nobler hypothesis is psychological self-insight. This is the most dependable part of the true servant-leaders.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 14)

Many of us have occasionally experienced this phenomenon. In each situation, our effectiveness in whatever we are doing takes a quantum leap.



We have called the state of mind immediately resulting from having a brief glimpse of the spiritual principles as being in *flow* (*Flow*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), being in the moment (*Be Here Now*, Ram Dass), or being in the *zone*. It is the sweet spot in tennis or the sweet shot in golf. It is when we deliver our most inspiring and connecting speeches, that is, speaking without thinking. It occurs when our words fly onto the paper as though our pen had a mind of its own. It occurs in the moment of insight and revelation when creative and transcendent ideas come to the fore. We are there when we are inexplicably moved by a painting or a melody, touched by the grandeur of a sunset, or overwhelmed by the simplicity and beauty of a person's face, a flower, a star. It occurs when we dance as though no one was looking, and it happens when our decisions and actions are absolutely perfect for the situation and the moment.

However, as mentioned, we usually notice this phenomenon only after the fact . . . after the results are in. Even then, we try to hold on to the moment. Although it is desirable, the more we try to make it a goal or destination to achieve, the more we look for it, the further away it retreats. Knowing this, leaders realize you cannot go forward from a mindset of distraction, worry or busy-ness to enable or achieve being in the *zone*. If anything, at the least, we need to be able to detach, relax, and go back or return to our innately healthier state of mind: that state of mind that existed before our personal, ego-driven thoughts took hold.

Although noticed and valued by each leader in this essay, this state is especially appreciated and recognized by Ric Rudman, recently retired COO and EVP for the Electric Power Research Institute. His professional reputation is one of creative problem solver, leading-edge visionary, builder of collaborative and consensual relationships, a deeply insightful individual, and an appreciative leader of strong character and ethics. However, he does not set out to be these things. He attributes these capacities to his curiosity about and exploration of *being more in the moment*. His progressive understanding of this state of being is an evolutionary journey.

Having had the privilege of having numerous discussions with him on



this topic, I noticed his journey of discovery and understanding closely parallels the path described in Realization #4, Diagram One. His awareness and interpretation of a state of being present started with the outer circle of results and actions, moving through past thinking and attitudes toward the more expansive consciousness of insights and principles. His dialogue with me facilitated my own journey of discovery and experience.

Through our conversations, I discovered my initial impression of *being in the moment* began with my acknowledging the reality of the present situation and acting accordingly. It was a function of my relationship to time and space. With this understanding, to truly display my capacity to be in the moment, I needed to focus on the moment without allowing external distractions to get in the way. If I was at home, I focused on “home and family” things, and if I was in the office, I consciously left the problems of home at home and stayed focused on work. Although it was a neat, predictable and orderly way of living, there were many times when this was not only impractical, but also improbable and unwise. I found myself battling my own thoughts and, in the name of doing things correctly, I was expending immense energy to control my thinking. Living life became predictable, stiff and one-dimensional. More damaging, I found myself judging others who allowed apparent distractions get in their way. This eventually caused a debilitating self-consciousness and criticism of others, leading to the very thing I wanted to avoid, a distracting lack of focus and confusion.

Instead of my focus being governed by timing, locale and situation, my next evolutionary step was to try to have my focus determined by the perceived priority that I put on the issue. However, setting priorities was also somewhat arbitrary and what I did not see was that I was the one who chose the yardstick to determine priority. It became clearer to me that priority was a personal choice and frequently did not lend itself to simple “right or wrong” answers. For instance, for one person it might be obvious that a decision impacting hundreds of people was tremendously more important than attending a birthday party for his child. Or that getting the job done was more important than maintaining a regimen of physical wellbeing.



Once my priorities were set, I thought I should not veer from them regardless of events. Again, this was fine if there was mutual agreement among all involved parties as to the “trumping” priority. However, this definition also had its flaws and limitations. I found myself living in a world overly governed by “either-or” thinking, trying to neatly fit every situation and event into a prescribed mold. This further limited my flexibility and openness to creativity and transcendent insights.

Ric’s realization, a deepener and a healer of mine, was that *being in the moment* is more than disciplined behavioral actions or myopically narrowing one’s focus. In fact, Ric’s present experience of *being in the moment* has little to do with time, space or form. Although his ability to effectively deal with the situation and the reality of the moment has everything to do with his ability to *be in the moment*, *being in the moment* is a truly expansive and multi-dimensional phenomenon. He sees it as much more a state of mind than anything that you do or focus on. In fact, the very things you notice in the moment are a result of the nature of your state of mind at the time. Your thinking, insights, actions and decisions are the byproduct of this state. A person’s state of being at a given time is both substantive and fragile. In a quality and “present” state, the leader has the capacity to simultaneously and holistically be aware of many forms of input ranging from the tangible and obvious to the intangible and impressive. Here, the leader discovers that *being in the moment* is an innate state of performance that is awakened when one can relax and quiet one’s personal thoughts, worries and agendas and be more open to insights and intuitive impressions. This state weatherproofs the leader’s capacity regardless of perceived contentiousness, pressure, importance and impact, and the meanings inherent to any person or group of people.

GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPLE-BASED DIALOGUE

Principle-Based Dialogue can only set the stage. The wisdom and break-through thoughts come from each individual and the collective whole and not from the consultant. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant acts



primarily as a catalyst to the source, not as the source itself. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant is first an exceptional listener. This type of listening provides the conduit for insight and healing to occur. As such, for the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant, the starting point in the process is first with *oneself*.

Sensitive to State of Mind

The most effective Principle-Based Dialogue consultants are adept at being sensitive to the state of mind of their client leader as well as to their own state of mind. They first notice their own state of health and, whenever necessary and possible, calm down or make adjustments if they realize they are not at their “best.” This capacity is also extended to the person with whom they are working. Remember, an important part of Principle-Based Dialogue is to impart the experience of health as much as it is to awaken insight. One’s state of being is intuitively taken into consideration or addressed before proceeding and definitely before any improvement suggestions or content (performance-based coaching) is exchanged.

With both Denny and Dave, I’ve been able to see when a vote of confidence or the offer of support becomes much more important than any lesson. I have been in awe at both these leaders’ sensitivity and ability to know when they should be talking, when they should be listening, and when they should be supporting and connecting. They clearly have an understanding of

healing, with its meaning, “to make whole.” . . .the servant-leader might also acknowledge that his own healing is his motivation. There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 36)

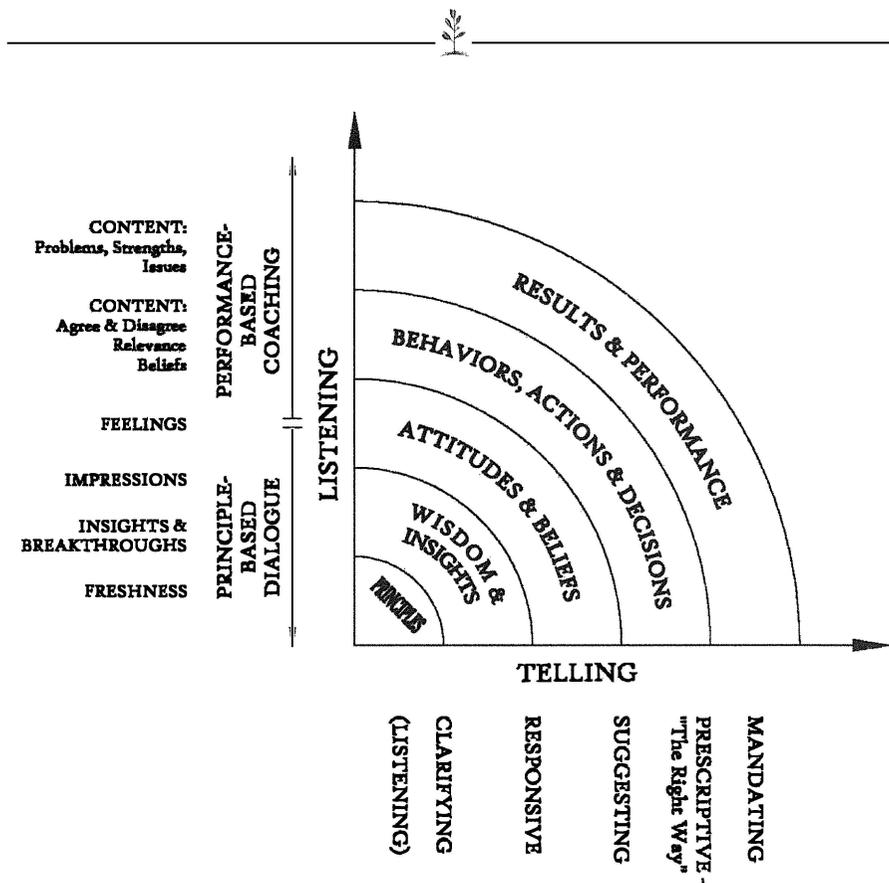


DIAGRAM 2

Listening

Most contemporary leadership improvement interventions are what I would call performance-based coaching. The focus of the listening that occurs in this scenario is to understand the problem or challenge and to suggest solutions (the coach's). The listening is to yield ideas for suggestions. Much of the conversation is spent in clarification, examining various methodologies and exploring numerous "how-to's" and techniques. Because the wisdom is often provided from the outside-in, the subsequent



focus then becomes one of reinforcement, application and implementation of the suggestions.

Although performance-based coaching does yield results, flexibility and constancy in this approach require on-going effort, attention and energy. Yet even here the direction and consistency is usually provided by leaders who themselves are operating via their insight and perspective—the very dimensions addressed by Principle-Based Dialogue.

The purpose behind Principle-Based Dialogue is not to pour into someone your own knowledge and wisdom. Its desire is to awaken and bring forth the person's own wisdom and insights. The results are not based on "borrowed knowledge," but are built upon the new thoughts and awarenesses specific to the person. Leaders are now experiencing the solving of issues and problems from their *zone*. They are looking at life's events through the clarity of being totally in the moment and accessing their wisdom. They are making decisions and setting direction from their vision ignited by their *flow* state.

Listening in performance-based coaching is listening for content and understanding. Listening in Principle-Based Dialogue is listening for less tangible, yet equally impactful dimensions. In this type of relationship, one listens for impressions, feelings of relief and peace, forgiveness and inspiration, new thoughts and break-through moments. These moments are often more subtle and less concrete than those moments found in performance-based coaching. As such, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant needs to be in a quieter and more centered state of mind in order to notice below-the-surface subtleties.

Connection

In Principle-Based Dialogue, there needs to be a sincere connection between the participants. For some, it is a deep and abiding sense of respect and trust. Often, there is a true affection and admiration for the individual. I feel honored, fortunate and grateful for having the opportunity to work with the people I work with. A foundation of respectful rapport is



crucial, necessary due to the personal and often confidential nature of Principle-Based Dialogue. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant maintains perspective and connectivity even in rare times when he or she experiences harshness, cynicism and attack. In these situations, the consultant can objectively see her or his own ego-based feelings coming to the forefront, yet see these emotions for what they are, that is, products of their own thinking, thereby enabling them to see through these feelings and act with authenticity, care and integrity.

Judgment-less

In the desire to create a totally open and safe environment for the individual, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant checks personal biases and prejudices at the door. In the moment of Principle-Based Dialogue, the consultant neither condones nor condemns the behavior and thinking occurring in her or his presence. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant does not impose unrealistic expectations on the client leader or her- or himself by expecting an absolute and constant positive attitude and optimism, a consistently healthy perspective, and never-ending accountability and wisdom. There is the understanding that happy and sad feelings are all a part of life and that there is not one “right” way to do life. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant can see the “innocence” of the individual, not necessarily the innocence in what they do and say, but the innocence in their thinking, and deeper, in their being. They see thought as the conduit and cause of the individual’s sense of reality, and in turn, the root of their actions and reactions, their way of life. The consultant realizes that “lost-ness” is innocence and that it can be but an event in one’s life and need not be a permanent situation.

Absolute confidentiality is a ground rule for this type of consulting, with one caveat mentioned up front—if the consultant feels that the person with whom he or she is working is about to do harm to themselves, to others and/or to the organization, then the discussion needs to take a different turn. Personally, I will discuss it with the client leader first, but hold



open the door to involve others if I do not feel safe and confident that the client leader's harmful thoughts are a passing condition. Regardless, even this "ground rule" is rooted in the desire to create an open and safe environment for dialogue.

Agenda-less

As a Principle-Based Dialogue consultant, you must eliminate as many self-serving issues between you and your client as possible. In continuing this journey, I have become acutely aware how much of my thinking is in fact self-serving and "me-based." Principle-Based Dialogue puts the welfare and health of the individual, and by extension the collective whole, at the forefront of every encounter.

As a consultant, one area I notice is how frequently I exercise my own point of view and prescribed "right" approach upon my clients without their permission. After all, I thought this is why my clients hired me. If my recommendations are not readily accepted, sadly, I find I often move into trying to convince them of my view. I mention other clients and their results, or I bring up their own words and sentiments. In short, when I am not living well, I move rather quickly into performance-based coaching. When my state of mind is aligned with a deeper state of being, whenever I feel this coming over me, I first ask permission to share my thoughts. But I remember that they are just that . . . my thoughts.

In addition, the second voice I need to quiet is the "professional salesman voice." I realize how this mindset often slowly erodes the openness of the relationship I share with my client leaders. In fact, one mentioned to me how refreshing it was to freely share during our dialogues all the issues and challenges on his plate without fearing being sold a series of workshops and programs to address his concerns. I don't know if this is a sound business practice, but I am always open for impromptu conversations without feeling the need to translate every minute into a consultative daily rate. Frequently, these conversations end in mutual laughter and a more hopeful sense of the



future . . . the very state of mind that is at the foundation of servant-leadership, and through servant-leadership, Principle-Based Dialogue.

Understanding and respecting their “thought” world

Although we have been discussing universal principles, I feel there must be a sincere desire and interest to step into the world of my clients. Again, I don’t know if this is an absolute, but I believe in listening to my clients through the relevance of their situation. Regardless of the company with whom I am working, I try to experience and understand their world as much as possible. Given the amount of time that I have, I realize I will not be an expert in the operational, fiscal and strategic challenges they find themselves facing. However, I should have an understanding of and appreciation for the tasks and challenges that are on their plates as executives. I should also have an understanding that although the challenges may appear similar to other situations, it is my job to find the uniqueness of these issues to the thinking of the individual before me and to the collective thinking of her/his organization. In fact, I find my clients are very willing to help me with this immersion learning process. Denny has invited me to a number of industry strategy sessions, as well as included me in strategic discussions with his senior team. He has asked that I review presentations done by specialized industry experts in healthcare leadership. Dave has included me in presentations and work facilitated by other industry specialists and consulting groups as well. This provides me with a temporal foundation and perspective of the many priorities and issues they face on a daily basis. I’ve found that with this grounding, I can better listen, understand and focus the Principle-Based approach to their situation.

One size fits all . . . one size does not fit all

The common foundation behind Principle-Based Dialogue is to notice, awaken and strengthen one’s state of insight, wisdom and healthy functioning. I see this state as an innate gift that is part of every one of us and is



what makes it universally applicable to everyone. However universal this may be, I find it is crucial to remember that how we manifest this state is unique and individualized, a matter of personal choice.

With this understanding, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant's journey is to find the "grains of truth and wisdom" behind each client's personal actions and thoughts. The consultant looks beyond the obvious behaviors of the person with whom she or he is working and holds lightly, if at all, the personal judgments and biases of the individual.

As much as possible, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant ideally sidesteps the temptation to turn her or his message into a goal or to establish a binary way of doing life, that is, the "right" state of mind versus the "wrong" state of mind, good moods and bad moods, this strategy versus that strategy, and so forth. For instance, although one is looking for a reflective and peaceful state of mind that is open to possibilities and insight, this relaxed, quiet state does not dictate that people speak more slowly or act more quietly. This does not mean that because one person feels more relaxed after he meditates, that others will as well. This does not mean that the insights that one gets in the shower are better than the insights another gets on walks or still another gets on long motor trips. The "magic" is not in the behavior.

Regardless of the universality of these principles, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant honors, cherishes and respects the individuality of each person. As much as possible, the consultant looks beyond behaviors and mechanisms to the feelings that come from insights and realizations.

Acknowledge and respect the boundaries of your capabilities and awareness

Professionally speaking, although I have been on this journey of learning and discovery for over thirty years, I am an aerospace and aeronautical engineer by education. I have also learned that the vast majority of the people with whom I get to work personally resonate with these messages and start to step onto a path of greater fulfillment, contribution and perspec-



tive. However, there have been a half dozen or so times when the difficulty that appeared before me was well beyond the scope of my capabilities, situation and training. I recognize that my competence has its limits and, in these situations, have recommended that individuals consult professionals who are more capable than I.

On a different level, this also reminds me not to speak beyond what I can see . . . my consciousness in the moment. In the past, I would present ideas, models and concepts of which I had more of an intellectual understanding than an experiential one. I provided a large menu of ideas whose purpose was to match the needs of the moment with previously learned lessons, concepts and models. As mentioned earlier, I continue to notice that there is a considerable difference between intellectually knowing *about* a concept and idea, and living life in the moment. I find I am more rigid, judgmental and one-dimensional when I live through and primarily share my intellectual thoughts. There is a constrictive and limiting feeling to these ideas, whereas when I share my impressions from insight, there is an expansive, creative and exploratory feeling to the conversation. There appears to be a depth and profundity to the latter that is missing from the former. When I can listen and speak from personal experience and understanding, I am much more effective.

There is a wealth of experience available on how to achieve this perspective of foresight . . . Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness. One is in the real world – concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

CONCLUSION

In the effort to create more positive, effective leaders, much of the



development effort has been focused on teaching the skills, perspectives, attitudes and character traits that past leaders have displayed. Although this is important, equally critical is to acknowledge the state of mind and the “source” from whence these abilities emerge into reality. To merely focus on what has gone before constricts the possibilities of positive leadership. The most effective leaders realize life is expansive and never-ending. This is equally true for the possible horizons of servant-leadership.

In our attempt to make sense of life, we often petrify the lessons of leadership. In extreme cases, we have boiled it down to objective fundamentals which, although easier to communicate and cognitively understand, sacrifice the spirit, the vision, and the wonder true leadership awakens in others.

In Principle-Based Dialogue, leaders pursue a balanced focus on both the journey of leadership exploration and on the specific learning goals and destinations to achieve and master. In its most innocent form, Principle-Based Dialogue awakens the capacity for healthy leadership.

The healthy society, like the healthy body, is not the one that has taken the most medicine. It is the one in which the internal health building forces are in the best shape.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 45)

Paul Nakai is the founding partner and principal of Leadership Spirit International, with offices in San Francisco, California, United States of America. Leadership Spirit International is a consulting group specializing in developing and deepening the leadership capacity of executives, in teambuilding and optimizing performance-based relationships, and in shaping organizational culture to more effectively meet organizational objectives. Paul was formerly a Managing Partner and Executive Vice President with the Senn-Delaney Leadership Consulting Group, where he specialized



in executive coaching and leadership development to support and lead intense business challenges such as mergers and acquisitions, shifting corporate cultures, leadership shortages, downturns or upswings in business, and debilitating internal strife. Paul has consulted and led major engagements in healthcare, insurance, financial services, manufacturing, energy, high technology, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and telecommunications, including crucial engagements at Three Mile Island Nuclear plant and for NASA in response to critical challenges. Through Leadership Spirit International, he is dedicated to 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.

The International Journal of Servant-Leadership welcomes Paul's understandings of corporate culture. We look forward to his ongoing editorials, which can be found in each volume of the journal under the section entitled: "Servant-Leadership and the Executive."