RECEIVING THE GIFT OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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Editor's note: This article is the first in a two-part series by Paul Nakai. Look for the second installment in the 2010 International Journal of Servant-Leadership.

Upon reflection, this leadership article has its roots in an event in 1951. It was the summer before my sister was born. My family had moved from our family home in Hawaii to Chicago to be with my Dad. He had just been admitted to Hines Veterans Hospital to learn how to live life being totally blind, and deaf in one ear. He had been part of the Japanese American 442nd RCT/100th Battalion and was severely wounded while on combat patrol outside of Livorno (Leghorn), Italy. Each weekend, my mother and I would pick him up at the hospital and spend time with him out in public.

One of those weekends started routinely enough. We had to go grocery shopping at the local supermarket. As the three of us stood in line, the checkout clerk kept moving us aside and waiting on the customers behind us. This happened a couple of times. Something was wrong. . . something did not feel right, and it was not getting better. Then my pregnant mother, with a blind husband and a four-year-old son in tow, spoke up and protested. Almost immediately, she was joined and reinforced by the two or three customers behind us. As a result, not only were we waited on, but the other clientele warned the checkout clerk that they were watching her to make sure that she was not overcharging my family. As my mother tells the story, one man recognized the combat medal that my Dad wore on his leather jacket and declared that he had fought alongside the Nisei in Italy. Another woman asked if she could help my family with the groceries.

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Not fully understanding the situation, I can remember being frightened and confused at first, but quickly being assured that we were "secure" and that "right" had prevailed. As brief as it was, the feeling in the checkout line, the friendliness and openness, the sharing and speaking with passion about an ideal, has always been an earmark of what I consider to be the result of healthy leadership. In fact, I am consistently grateful whenever I receive this gift.

Embarrassingly, I must admit that there have been many times since then when I have taken the easier and more expeditious way out of a knotty situation. However, in those instances when I recall the feelings that I felt as a recipient of such values-based courage, I do find myself taking the higher road of greater honesty, love, and faith. For me, this has been the message and promise of *servant-leadership*.

How does one receive the gift of servant-leadership? As with many gifts, one is touched with gratitude and closeness toward the giver. One has a sense of abundance and anticipation for a newer and brighter future. Often, there is a resonance and desire to reciprocate. Receiving the gift stimulates the desire to give. When the ideals of servant-leadership touch us in this manner, we are moved to act as a servant-leader. However, I am reminded of the adage that "we can only give that which we have." Beyond intellect, I hope in this paper to share what I've had the good fortune to learn from various organizational leaders.

LEARNING LEADERSHIP

Having surrounded my life with tales of great leadership and having the good fortune to work with individuals who I felt displayed this wonderful trait, heaven knows I have enough material to fill volumes. I could share stories of leaders making a difference in all walks of life and in an infinite number of situations. However, I realize that out of my admiration for this trait, the grander that I made leadership, the more out of reach it became for everyone and anyone. After all, in my eyes, it was the reserve of a select few who appeared to be willing to pay the tariff or had the good fortune of

having a personally inspiring epiphany. It was captured in the courage and conviction to speak up to the anger of the checkout clerks in our lives.

However, I've come to realize that this is not the case. I do not mean to trivialize or minimize the phenomenal influence or impact that leaders have made on our lives. I do mean to say that it appears that positive leadership is a capacity that we all possess, regardless of upbringing or background. I would venture to say that it is a normal and natural phenomenon that we can all awaken and display. For some, leadership comes sporadically, and for others, it is a stance that we choose to take toward life. I recall a lesson I might have learned earlier in life about leadership, but failed to pick up on its "subtlety." I had been studying and categorizing leadership for a number of years at that time. One of my early mentors kept telling me that the study of leadership without a leadership mindset was marginal at best. In other words, I might be able to talk *about* leadership and probably be fairly accurate in my assessments, but without the leadership mindset, the lasting difference I could make would be minimal. To help me see this point, he arranged to have me facilitate a number of leadership workshops for some inmates in Hawaii State Prison. The one thing I did learn quickly was that these men were exceptional con men and, as such, they could tell when someone was trying to sound like more than he actually was. They could smell me out when my words came from my intellect versus when I was truly grounded in my experiences. When I spoke beyond what I knew, the more polite men merely stopped paying attention or started side conversations. The others became disgusted, insulting, argumentative, and threatening.

When this was happening, I thought that the problem was one of misunderstanding and that the answer to the problem was for me to become even more intellectual and to come up with more examples that made my case. Obviously, this only exacerbated the situation. In essence, as my consciousness rose, I learned to detect the difference between *knowing about* something versus truly *knowing* it. This understanding put me on a different

path of learning and discovery that we will discuss later in this paper. It is this mindset, grounded in authenticity, that I hope to leave my children.

SO FAR, DIFFICULT TIMES HAVE BEEN A GOOD THING

Last night, my wife, Nancy, and I were having dinner with very dear friends. They were celebrating their seventh wedding anniversary. Nancy and I have been married for thirty-six years. During the meal, they raised the question of whether we had ever had a crisis point in our relationship where there was doubt about the marriage. In all honesty, there was one instance very early on where we wondered if we could make it through it as husband and wife. It would be a terrible injustice to attribute our continuation as a couple and the resilience of our relationship to only one or two criteria. However, we have noticed that the numerous traits and characteristics that have assisted us over the years stem from only a few principles.

In reflecting upon our larger lives, among an infinite number of wonderful, loving, and inspiring moments, there have also been a number of crises that we have faced, such as the death of loved ones, being laid off, life-threatening health issues and accidents, losing our nest egg, and the failure of a business venture. In hindsight, we found that each of these situations was actually a crucible moment that enabled us to be more loving and vibrant than before it occurred. What we noticed was that the very principles that provided us with the needed perspective and resilience to see life beyond the difficulties were the very same leadership principles that we have been exploring over the last couple of years. We discovered that the principles that provide us with guidance to deal with crises are the very same principles that enable us to re-engage and overcome the stalls in our lives. However, the value of these principles goes well beyond getting us out of difficult moments. The majority of the time, they are at the foundation of our proactive journey of contribution, service, and peace. This is true in both personal and organizational situations.

I hasten to add that I find it difficult at times to cognitively recognize these principles at play in the moment. Because of their comprehensive and

universal nature, when I try to speak to the principles, I find that I do not do them justice and get lost in their simplicity and immense nature. Although limited, I am more able to speak to them when they manifest for me in more visible and tangible ways. Sometimes they show up in my feelings and attitudes or in the mindset that I assume. At other times, they enable me to take a broader, more impersonal stance toward life and the situation at hand. Regardless, my recognition usually comes after the fact and after reflection. These stances toward life are at the heart of the gifts that are being offered. As such, for the rest of this paper, I want to clarify that we are not talking about the principles themselves, but are pointing toward how they visibly and consciously manifest in our day-to-day lives.

THE SERVANT-LEADER'S LEVEL OF PLAY

By definition, the servant-leader is one who leads through a healthier and wiser level of consciousness. The intent of the servant-leader is to be a servant first. The integrity of the servant-leader is in the fact that those around him/her "become wiser, freer, more autonomous, healthier, and better able themselves to become servants," and that the "least privileged in society" will "benefit, or at least not be further deprived" (Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership*, 1970, p. 264).

The way that life and the world appear to the servant-leader is reflective of this mindset. This mindset is but one of an infinite number of mindsets or stances toward life that are available to us. These stances toward life are neither arbitrary nor happenstance. I first wrote about these mindset levels in the book *The Mindful Corporation*. More recently, examples of these levels were articulated in the best-seller *Tribal Leadership*. To further clarify this point, as an example, the different levels of consciousness could be identified in the following ways:

- LIFE is wonderful . . . feelings of meaning, service, gratitude, and wisdom

- WE are in this together . . . feelings of collaboration, synergy, and contentment
- I can contribute and add value . . . feelings of accountability and winning
- It's all about ME . . . feelings of stress, competition and jealousy
- Others should be controlled and punished . . . Feelings of obligation, guilt, and judgment
- Life is unfair and stinks . . . Troubled feelings of anger and fear

When a person is in a servant-leader state of mind, he/she probably sees life through the higher levels of consciousness. I mention this here because, by design, this paper is written through the perspective of those higher levels.

THE PERFECT STORM . . . CONVERGENCE OF PRIMARY IDEALS

It seems that there is a convergence and confluence of leadership understanding that answers many of the pragmatic shortfalls in the present train of thought and mindset. More accurately, it seems that we are in one of those historical moments when the level of principle-based understanding rises to a new plateau. The guide in this part of the journey will be a greater clarity of direction, a greater respect for dignity and vibrancy, and a greater openness to discovery. It is a formless and more creative exploration.

As we achieve and accept this new level of perception, our efforts will be to bring form to this understanding . . . to objectively define, solidify, and quantify this new plateau of subjectivity. Unfortunately, when this happens, the velocity of vertical discovery lessens as the horizontal breadth of various paradigms and models increases. This horizontal development continues until the limits of the theories become evident and a more comprehensive understanding is once again required. The cycle begins again.

Interestingly enough, many of the more effective and evolving contemporary leadership understandings point to the same fundamental ideals. In addition, the more enduring past understandings also point to these same

ideals. The philosophical elements behind servant-leadership, appreciative inquiry, chaos theory, and positive psychology are amazingly synonymous. Current research in *thriving* being conducted by the University of Michigan, the University of Southern California, and the University of California-Irvine also point toward these same elements. These ideals are manifested in the positional stances through which one experiences various life events.

Taking this understanding a step further, the Senn-Delaney organization has surveyed a number of executives in their global clients. Reassuringly, the relevance and effectiveness of these ideals have been further substantiated by their practical application in these organizations. This is the cornerstone of the guidance provided through Senn-Delaney's interventions in assisting their clients with culture shaping, leadership development, and the formation of high performance relationships.

The questions that Senn-Delaney asked of their client leaders were simple and straightforward. They wanted to hear from them about their leadership experience. Some of these questions were:

- What do you feel makes you an effective leader?
- To what do you attribute your capacity to consistently get results?
- What happens when your personal purpose or direction is not aligned with the job/organization? For those who work for you? How do you remedy or reconcile it?
- If you had a "sweet spot" or "zone" . . . how would you describe it?
- Have there been crucible or seminal events/situations that stand out for you?
- What have been pivotal epiphanies that have had a lasting influence on how you view your leadership?
- If you were to describe your authentic self . . . what are your key, non-negotiable, absolute values, beliefs, guidelines?
- Have you had mentors along the way? What have been the lasting lessons that have stayed with you? Situations and examples?

- If you could pass something on to your kids to help them in their journey through life . . . what would it be?

Although each story was different, the basic ideas and subsequent leadership positions were amazingly similar. In fact, after we had summarized their comments with them, many of these leaders were astonished by our ability to clearly articulate and to bring into focus three elements that have served them well throughout their lives.

These three elemental stances toward life that these leaders all shared in one form or another are:

Stance #1: A hunger and humility for learning and exploration. Holding "lightly" what they already know or have experienced. A high regard and gratitude for epiphanies. Seeking and discovering simpler, more profound and creative ways to get things done.

Stance #2: A personal ownership of and appreciation for one's vitality and vibrancy. Valuing deep and natural connection with others. A respect for rapport, collaboration, personal dignity, and resiliency.

Stance #3: A clear and evolving sense of meaning, purpose, mission, and direction. A consistent sense of authenticity. Gratitude for inspiration and wisdom. A connection with and to something larger than self.

Essentially, these stances form the basis for the effectiveness of one's mindset in the moment as well as the ongoing attitude one takes toward life. In addition, each stance embodies both intrinsic and extrinsic capacities.

Each of the leaders had a personal relationship with each life stance. They found themselves integrating all three elements into their cohesive leadership understanding. For the most part, they intuitively and *simultaneously* accessed all three in any given moment. In addition, although all three were present, we noticed that one or two of these stances occupied their "front burner of consciousness." In these cases, these more dominant stances contributed to the core identity of these leaders. What follows is our

current understanding of these three stances and examples of how they manifest.
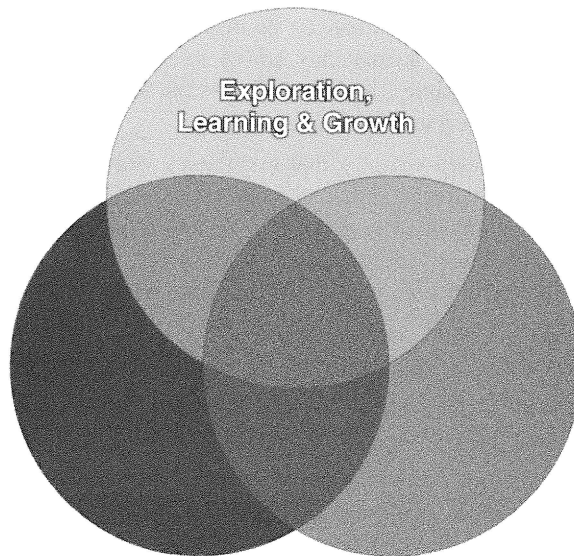
Stance #1: Exploration, learning and growth

Many of us admire organizations like UPS, Pixar, and Apple for their reputations for creativity and innovativeness. Even within traditional and bureaucratic organizations, there are strong pockets of innovation and change. Why is this important?

There are numerous examples of successful organizational change occurring without the external catalyst of crisis or having the bottom line numbers be in decline. On the other hand, there are an equal number of examples where, in spite of overwhelming evidence that change is needed, organizations have resisted change and reinvention . . . unfortunately, to their detriment or demise. For the successful and dynamic organization, change is not only a strategic necessity, it is a cultural norm . . . a way of life. This capacity is the conduit that places people and organizations onto the path that enables them to best meet the future.

As reported by Josh Bersin of Bersin & Associates:

> A recent global survey of 1100 business leaders by Boston Consulting Group found that one of the top three things keeping CEOs awake at night was their ability to "build a learning organization." Our research shows clearly that organizations can be broadly grouped into two types: those that "learn" have an uncanny ability to evolve: they are what we call "enduring" companies, and they find ways to continuously change their products and services as markets change.
>
> Our research demonstrates that companies which have a "learning culture" have much greater financial returns over a 10-20 year period—in fact the 80 top companies in our 780 company research group, deliver more than 10% greater earnings growth and over 15% revenue growth over a 10 year period than the average in their industry.

It is our experience and premise that these organizations are clearly a product of their leaders' stance toward life in general. Seeking and being open to paradigm-shifting change is a mindset and an understanding of how life works. This foundation of consciousness gives strength and clarity to the cultural values and organizational infrastructure that facilitate innovation and change.

All of the leaders with whom I have the good fortune to work share this characteristic. One such leader is Jim Hart. Jim is the CEO of Senn-Delaney, a global consulting firm specializing in culture shaping, executive leadership development, and optimizing work relationships. When he assumed the helm of the organization, Senn-Delaney was teetering on the brink of collapse due to a poorly executed merger with a larger conglomerate. Adding to this malaise, its service offering was not current with contemporary technology or philosophy; its infrastructure was based on decades-old assumptions; its consulting force, although personally motivated, was not organizationally focused; and, in general, its client relationships had not achieved the promised relevance or depth.

Although Jim had not run a consulting company in the past, he was convinced that the answers to the problems were simply waiting to be found. He is a principle-based and balanced corporate leader who has a personal respect and hunger for exploration, growth, discovery, and innova-

tion. He thrives in the state of curiosity and in finding creative and profound answers to nagging challenges. His self-definition is captured in learning how to better himself both personally and professionally. This stance toward life of learning and discovery is on his "front burner."

As the new CEO of the firm, Jim did things that had not been done before. He went out to the existing Senn-Delaney client base and solicited their feedback and suggestions. More importantly, he committed himself and the company to proactively act on this information. He changed the consultants' affiliation agreements, as well as how they were to be recognized and compensated. He reduced the corporate overhead and streamlined the management structure. He intelligently introduced technology into this "high touch" organization and consistently explored new ideas and philosophies that yielded greater results in the areas of culture shaping, leadership development, and relational fulfillment and achievement. He explored different product offerings that could be tailored to apply to multiple business situations while remaining pertinent and effective. He changed Senn-Delaney's relationship with the business community and enriched their association with other Chief Executives. Often, he did this in the face of decades-old resistance to change framed as a criticism that he was destroying the pride and the spirit of the company. He ran into peoples' resentment that he supposedly did not care about the people . . . or simply, cynicism because what he was undertaking had not been done before. However, the truth of the matter was that he took more supportive actions to take care of the employee in difficult times.

Throughout all of this, through his personal grounding in stance #1, Jim's enthusiasm over discovering new, more impactful ways of serving the clients weatherproofed his stamina and focus.

Today, Senn-Delaney is a re-branded, highly profitable consultancy dedicated to partnering with their clients in achieving cultural, relational, and leadership goals.

Similar to other executives who are open to epiphanies and have the commitment to change accordingly, Jim displayed the following traits:

- Humility and openness to "not knowing"
- Impersonal curiosity
- A sense of growth, change, and development
- Unconditional openness to possibilities, insights, and epiphanies
- Receptivity to experimentation, exploration, and creativity
- Responsiveness to horizontal and vertical learning
- Openness to discovery and moving forward

These traits earmark the first elemental stance toward life, that is, the learning mindset. As an example, most recently, I had the opportunity to make a presentation on servant-leadership with a friend and client, Terry Hartshorn. Terry is a founder of PacifiCare, a large California-based HMO. He was its CEO and chairman. He was also the CEO of UniHealth, a consortium of client hospitals. In our discussion, we noticed that the most effective and dynamic leaders could all describe their personal and professional journeys as a series of life-altering epiphanies. These are the manifestations of being open to seeing life's events through clearer eyes.
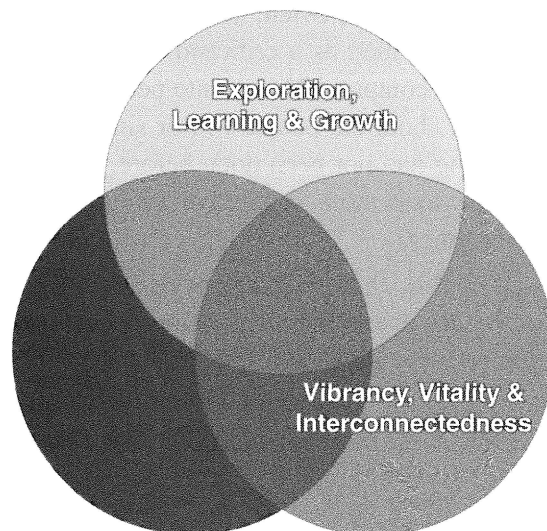
Stance #2: Vibrancy, vitality and interconnectedness

I've written about Denny Litos in the past. Denny is the present CEO of Doctors Medical Center. Like Jim, Denny has incorporated the synergy of the three principles in an extremely effective leadership capability. I would venture to say that at the foundation of his competency as a health-care executive are his integrity, trustworthiness, and ability to bring out the best in others.

When I first met Denny, he was merging three separate and previously competitive hospital organizations into one cohesive unit, the Ingham Regional Medical Center. Although the operational challenges were daunt-ing, the relational and cultural issues were even more so. Unfortunately, at that time, the notions of trust, respect, and "benefit of the doubt" were only intellectual concepts. As a result, open communications, mutual problem solving, and insuring the welfare of the total organization were equally challenging. It was normal for people to act out against one another. In addition to the financial challenges of healthcare, Denny was dealing with a decades-old adversarial and subversive union. He had to deal with dysfunc-tional physicians who thought that they were invulnerable because they brought a high number of their patients to the hospital. There were also those physicians who felt the same way because they brought the benefit of their clinical expertise to the reputation of the organization. He was dealing with angry senior nurses who had a sense of entitlement while antagonizing or driving away younger talent. Unfortunately, because a lot of time, resources, and energy were spent dealing with interpersonal issues or dys-functional individual behaviors, fewer resources were available to directly improve clinical and organizational excellence.

At his core, I can honestly say that Denny epitomizes respectfulness and vibrancy. He has consistently displayed an uncannily accurate respon-siveness to interpersonal situations. Although sensitive to a fault, in the final analysis, he does not tolerate dysfunctional or disrespectful behavior. He has a deep faith in people, believing that when given the opportunity, most want to trust and respond from a healthier, more collegial perspective. For Denny, the epitome of leadership is living life through authentic values.

Combine this with his expertise and vision as a hospital executive and with his almost insatiable desire to learn and grow, and you have a positive, formidable, and influential leadership force.

Denny started his journey toward organizational excellence with an honest self-evaluation, both personal and professional. He discovered those areas that were inviolable to him as a leader. As part of this process, he also evaluated and coached his senior team. He weighted character and values equally with competency and performance. He made a number of difficult yet necessary decisions about the leadership fabric of the organization. With his team, he established a clear and specific statement of the vision, purpose, and values of the organization. With this as the foundation, he led the establishment of a code of conduct and standards of performance in all areas and with all constituencies of the hospital. Although logical and worthy, this effort was far from simple and easy. He called upon the collective wisdom and common sense of the people around him. In addition to the employees and affiliated physicians, he sought the counsel of his Board and his Foundation, and, as Chair of the Chamber of Commerce, met regularly with influential elements of the community.

Like many of the leaders identified in this paper, Denny displayed the following traits of vitality and connectedness:

- A personal vibrancy and an enthusiasm for life
- Non-contingent well-being and personal accountability for his state of mind
- Gratitude and generosity
- A rapport-based connectedness with others
- Forgiveness and an openness to a fresh start
- An ability to see the psychological innocence in others
- Resilience and perspective

. . . and as the result of awakening this leadership in those around him, Denny's organization was awarded J.D. Powers and Associates' Distin-

guished Hospital status for its outstanding level of customer satisfaction and service. A number of their medical services were evaluated by Health-Grades to be in the top 5% nationally; additionally, they doubled their market share, expanded their service offerings, and had been profitable for ten straight years.
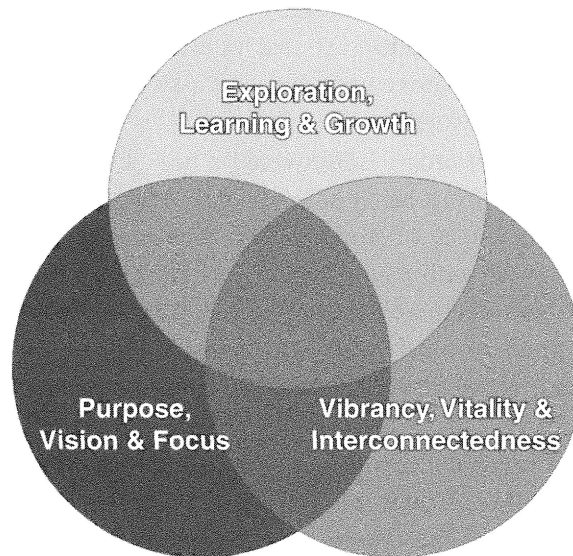
Stance #3: Purpose, direction and focus

Many of my friends and colleagues are at the point in their careers where retirement from their jobs is a real possibility. Even for those who are financially prepared, this is a confusing and frightening possibility. They've been able to put their kids through school or set themselves up so that they are financially secure. Even if they didn't "have to work," the question around retirement becomes, what would they do? What do they want to do?

I can understand and appreciate this dilemma. A few years ago, after twenty-two years with my company, I was laid off. Although my change in employment status was made with great respect and humanity, the question of "What will I do now?" occupied my mind. I had enjoyed my job and I

made a good living from it. At first, I thought that I would simply continue doing the same thing, but now as an individual performer. In fact, I still had three client accounts with whom I could work. However, enjoyable as this was, doing what I had always been doing was not as personally fulfilling as I had anticipated. Although it was worthwhile, I found myself trying to deliver innovative value within a leadership model that had not appreciably changed for over two decades. At that moment, I did not feel capable enough to question or improve upon the very assumptions of the philosophical foundation of my work.

However, in short order, I discovered a new level of satisfaction and inspiration that came from being able to work freely with leaders like Jim and Denny. This new way of working with them was different from how I had been able to work with them previously. I wanted to find out why I felt this way. What had I stumbled across in this phase of my life? Basically, I got more and more in touch with my professional purpose and ultimate mission. I started to get clearer and clearer about what brought meaning to my life.

I've always respected and appreciated individuals who have accepted the leadership challenge. More importantly, they've done so through a deep and abiding respect for the dignity and integrity of others, they've maintained their sense of trustworthiness and authenticity, and they have been willing to question and change the old ways of doing things. In addition to working for them, I had hoped to find a way to partner with them . . . to mutually learn and develop with them, to be invested in their personal well-being and to be alongside them as they walked on their life's path. I wanted not only to be able to work with these positive and inspiring leaders in this fashion, but also to bring them together to share and move their understanding to new levels of profundity and effectiveness.

Like Jim and Denny, Dave Roberson is a great example of this kind of leadership. Today, Dave is a Senior Vice President with Hewlett-Packard. At the time I started working with him, he was CEO of Hitachi Data Systems. In addition to being a savvy businessman, Dave was also intuitively

sensitive and would consistently lead toward his personal purpose and mission. He had always been one moved by and committed to taking action on what he saw as meaningful for himself, as well as for his people and his organization. I remember his sharing with me that one of his senior team appreciated him for being the "soul of the company." Surprisingly, Dave appeared embarrassed and a little disappointed. When I queried him, he mentioned that he didn't want to be seen as the "soul" of the company, but that he wanted to create a company with "soul." He felt that to the degree to which he was successful in doing so, his leaders and the people of the company would share a universal platform of rapport and partnership not only with each other, but also with their customers, with other parts of the corporation, and with the communities in which they served.

I had thought that clarity of meaning and mission gave one a sense of direction and purpose. It enabled one to prioritize and make decisions. However, I got to experience an unexpected impact of vision and sense of fulfillment one day when Dave invited me to attend an executive briefing with one of their larger clients. The conversation started in a normal fashion with each group talking about needs, desired outcomes, value propositions, and products. However, there soon arose a synergy and enthusiasm to the conversation. I could no longer tell who was the client CEO and who was the vendor CEO. The client CEO was the administrative executive for the federal government of a large country. He shared his personal vision of creating a symbiotic synergy among his country's people. He saw that an important factor in accomplishing this was the role that technology would play in bringing together the people of his country. Unlike the U.S., which has 2-3 technological generations to bridge, his country had at least 10 . . . from aboriginal to the globally technically savvy.

Interestingly, Dave shared his desired legacy as well. As the first Caucasian to lead a multibillion-dollar division of Hitachi, he was committed to bringing down the traditional functional and societal silos that got in the way of fully meeting and anticipating the client's present and future needs. These two leaders were talking about how they could mutually impact the

course of events should their vision come to pass. Within the context of technology and data storage, they were talking about industry, product, and cultural evolution. They discussed both ideas and ideals. They mutually shared what was personally important to them while they were in this leadership role. They sat on the same side of the table and they talked about the ideal partnership and what that might look like. They discussed what they each could bring to this symbiotic relationship.

Much to the chagrin of the rest of the attendees, the two CEOs outpaced everyone's ability to keep up and to anticipate where the conversation was logically headed. Although there was no talk about closing deals, financials, and deliverables, that day, Hitachi signed a multi-million dollar agreement. Equally important, they had established a collaborative relationship with one of their most important clients.

As long as I've known Dave, he has consistently displayed the traits of this life stance. Some of these facets are:

- An appreciation for and awe of the visionary "state of mind"
- A deepening clarity of meaning, purpose, and mission
- Inspired certainty and confidence
- Clarity of and accountability for direction, focus, and meaning
- Authenticity transcending ego, greed, and pettiness
- Common sense and wisdom
- A capacity for forethought

IF YOU KNEW HOW AN AIRPLANE FLEW . . .

My dearest friend and best man at our wedding recently passed away. Although we had both graduated with degrees in aeronautical and aerospace engineering, throughout his adult life, he refused to fly. He would share with me that he fully understood the theory of flight, but he didn't have confidence in the application of that theory. He thought that there were too many variables that could negatively impact the fragile balance of those

concepts. Metaphorically, purposeful flight is a simultaneous and integrated balance of three forces that counteract the pull of gravity and the friction of resistance. These three forces are thrust, lift, and drag. All three work in concert to insure reliable flight. If you were to diminish one, you would have to bolster the others. For instance, if lift were minimized, you would have to increase thrust to insure flight. You find this phenomenon in rockets. My dear friend could not see the resilience and dynamic flexibility inherent in the "sweet spot" of flight. As a result of his doubt, he was rarely able to enjoy travel around our country or the world.

As an example of thrust-lift-drag in life, if you were to diminish vitality, you would find yourself having to put more energy or focus into the endeavor in order to accomplish what you desired to accomplish. At any given moment, effective leaders have this capacity to simultaneous integrate all three elements of vitality, learning, and purpose. It is this apparent "juggling act" that brings the full force of this effort to bear. When we speak of one's "sweet spot," we refer to one's ability to come from the state of mind that simultaneously integrates the three stances of vitality and interconnectedness, creative learning and epiphanies, and personal meaning and purpose.

A good example comes from the recent study of Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. He discovered a more effective way of exploring successful leadership. Instead of trying to learn from what these leaders *did*, he postulated that "a more productive, though more difficult, approach is to focus on *how a leader thinks*–that is to examine the antecedent of doing, or the ways in which leaders' cognitive processes produce their actions." By interviewing leaders with exemplary records, Roger learned that many of them shared a common ability. As he writes:

> They have the predisposition and capacity to hold in their heads [opposing] ideas at once. And then, without panicking or simply settling for one alternative or the other, they're able to creatively resolve the tension

> between those [ideas] by generating a new one that contains elements of
> the others but is superior to both.

At times, it may appear that the choices before you are diametrically opposed. Either choice may be sound . . . or either choice may have its flaws. However, I have noticed that the leaders with whom I have worked have an intuitive understanding of the capability identified by Roger Martin. Loosely translated, they realize that problems cannot be fully solved at the level of consciousness that sees them as problems. One needs to be patiently open to creatively resolving the tension of the problems by generating a new solution that contains elements of the old but is superior and more lasting.

I've experienced this numerous times in my work with others. I've been in awe of the creativity and inclusiveness of the solutions that Jim Hart and Dave Roberson discover. However, I never saw what was happening because I was so focused on what these leaders *did* instead of first trying to see how they *thought*.

As an example, as long as I've known Denny Litos, I've been impressed by his ability to be a pragmatic, values-based contemporary leader who effectively and proactively addresses the challenges of the moment. Additionally, I've been inspired by his capacity to be an insightful visionary and to accurately anticipate where things may lead. The feedback that Denny would consistently receive from his senior team was that they would not know where he was headed or what was important to him at the moment. This meant that they frequently had to check in with him on major decisions before they took action. They felt that they had to do this to insure alignment of direction, a necessity which they perceived as a bottleneck that slowed progress and action.

At first, Denny saw the issue as one of leadership confidence (vitality and interconnectedness) and an openness to creativity and innovativeness (learning and exploration). In response to his team, Denny increased the communications with his leaders. He held bi-monthly staff meetings, he had email bulletins addressing his direction and thinking, he would frequently

copy them in on articles and books that interested him, and he had "speak up" breakfasts where individuals could question or discuss any issue that was important to them. He also conducted regular leadership and team development workshops.

Denny and I conducted monthly counseling sessions with each member of the team. We instituted a culture-shaping process that identified and implemented their core values. We started to involve the next levels of management. After doing this for six months, we surveyed the team. To a person, they were all appreciative of the effort and gained tremendous value both individually as well as a team. However, they still felt that they were frequently in the dark and still needed to check in with Denny for clarity. After reflective conversations, Denny started to realize that we had not considered the power of the appropriate mindset or stance. He discovered that instead of merely trying to resolve issues through the existing leadership mindset, he wanted to assist the individuals on his team in raising their consciousness and developing their personal visionary mindset (foresight, purpose, and meaning). As we discussed earlier, the results that started to happen from that time forward were phenomenal.

Not everyone remained on the team. A couple of executives left because they had difficulty leading through the core values or integrity and respecting the dignity of others. A long-time colleague and friend also left to become the CEO of a community organization, something of meaning that more clearly spoke to his passion. However, there were a number of senior team members who themselves awakened to their professional vision and purpose. The CFO stepped up to a more strategic organizational leadership role while raising the effectiveness, anticipation, and accuracy of the finance function. The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Nursing Officer both took a more proactive stance in developing a healthy, high-performing, professional, patient-focused culture. In addition, because of their results and character, a number of senior managers were promoted to larger roles within the corporate organization.

More importantly, all of these executives now had the "eyes" to see the

information provided as visionaries in their own right. The conversations that they had were more dialogic, interpretive, and constructive than merely "checking in." They were moving their team's alignment to a higher level of understanding.

THE END OF PART ONE AND THE HOPE FOR PART TWO

It is our hope that we have presented our findings and conclusions in an understandable fashion. If they are true, how do we make them reality in our day-to-day lives?

In Part Two of this article, it is our intent to answer the following questions:

- How do I use this understanding to better assess my capabilities, the situation, and the organization within which I work? How will this assist me to prioritize what I should focus on and how to go about it? How can this understanding help me re-start or recharge my efforts and free me from my or my organization's stalls?
- How can I articulate and awaken this capacity in others as well as in myself? Is there a more aligned form of counsel or coaching that better mirrors these ideals and stances toward life? How do I bring out the "best" in myself as well as in others?
- How do I develop the capacity to come from my "sweet spot" more of the time? What lessons and awareness do I need to cultivate to strengthen my ability to patiently wait for higher order thought or insight?
- What are the universal Principles that I've avoided discussing in Part One but are at the foundation of these stances toward life?

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deepening the leadership capacity in executives. Having previously been a Managing Partner and Executive Vice President with Senn-Delaney for twenty-six years, Paul presently counsels select Senn-Delaney executives. While actively consulting for the firm, Paul specialized in executive coaching and leadership development to support and lead an optimal corporate culture. Paul worked with key executives and senior management teams facing 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 to and led major engagements in healthcare, insurance, financial services, manufacturing, energy, high technology, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and telecommunications. Through the principles of servant-leadership, he is dedicated to assisting 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 understanding of the challenges and the promises of organizational leadership. 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."