



FILLING IN THE GAP: *Leadership* IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The following speech was given by Dede Henley, CEO, The Dede Henley Group to the Western Energy Institute in Las Vegas, March 2007.

My purpose here is to encourage you to think about what leaders will need over the next ten years or so. After studying leadership and working with great organizations for the past 24 years, I have a bit of a vista to see from.

This is structured into three parts, using the imagery of the car with you in the driver's seat, because I continue to assert that that is exactly where you are. You are not without power. We'll look together through the rearview mirror first to see what is in our past, what we are driving away from. Then, we'll look around at where we are right now and create the case for change. Finally, we'll look through the windshield to see what's ahead.

Who is a leader?

As a great football coach, once said at the beginning of spring training, "Let's begin with the basics: THIS is a football." I would like to offer my definition of leadership. More specifically, who is a leader and who is not. A "leader" is not defined by a person's position on the organization chart. Nor is it true to say that some people are leaders and others are not. We believe that anyone can "lead" at any given moment, regardless of where he or she is in the hierarchy. Secretaries can lead. Scientists can lead, CEO's may or may not lead, depending on what they do. You are always leading people in something. The question is what? Ron Heifitz offered the following definition in his book, "Leadership Without Easy Answers:" "Leadership means influencing the community to face its problems."

This definition, as you can see, turns the traditional notion of leadership on its head: no one is barred by this definition from exercising leadership, by helping the group face its problems. The trick is, that doesn't mean just pointing out the problems, although that may be a good first step. Facing "our" problems means facing up to how our behaviors contribute to the results we are getting. Laying the blame on somebody else is not helping the community to face its problems, because laying blame externalizes the problem (and therefore the solution) when we need to internalize them! In other

words we need to look in the mirror to assess how our actions or inactions contribute to improvement or contribute to dysfunction.

With this as a way of listening, knowing that each and every one of you is a leader, let's look through our collective rearview mirror. As we all know, the "Great Man Myth" has been deeply ingrained in our American psyche. We have been a nation enamored of heroes. Consider midnight rider Paul Revere or basketball's Michael Jordan or Microsoft's Bill Gates. And depending on our politics, George W. Bush, Al Gore, Bill Clinton. Our ideas of leadership have been entwined with our ideas of heroism, so much so that the distinction between "Leader" and "Hero" often have been blurred. For all of the rhetoric about teamwork, we continue to reward people as individual performers. Our performance and appraisal systems are based on the individual, not that of the greater team of which he/she is a part.

To give us a bit of historical context, let's look back over the past 100 years or so. Our increasingly outmoded systems were designed for control, order and prediction; to take the human factor out of organizing. Part of this paradigm came to us by way of Frederick Taylor, an American engineer and the father of time, motion and productivity improvement who lived at the turn of the 20th century. His focus was in breaking a job into its component parts and measuring each to the hundredth of a minute. His philosophy was that workers of the industrial age were not paid to think, they were paid to produce. They were paid to be efficient. There was no need for creativity, innovation, teamwork. Workers were asked to leave their personal problems "at the door" (as if that could actually be done!) Work was "dehumanized." How many of you lived through the remnants of this era? How many of you feel like you are still living it?

Collectively, we are coming to the realization that this paradigm has outlived its usefulness. If we look newly, we will see that throughout history, groups of people, often without conscious design, have successfully blended individual and collective effort to create something new and wonderful. Indeed, we are coming to the understanding that "none of us is as smart as all of us."

With that, let's move from the rearview mirror and look around at where we are now. To quote renowned scientist and leadership author, Meg Wheatley, "This is an era of

many messes. Some of these we've created because we have acted on assumptions that do not create sustainable societies and organizations. We act as if humans are motivated by selfishness, greed and fear. We act as if we are not interdependent. We act as if hierarchy and bureaucracy are the best forms of organizing. We act as if efficiency is the premier measure of value. We believe people work best under controls and regulations. We continue to see diversity as a problem. We act as if continual economic and organizational growth is good. We act as if keeping the shareholders happy is our number one (and sometimes only) priority. We act as if a healthy economy leads naturally to a healthy society. We believe that only a few people are creative."

These beliefs have created some mischief. If you look globally, it's hard to find examples in any country or major sector – healthcare, education, religion, governance, or development – of successfully solving complex dilemmas. Attempts to resolve them only lead to more problems, unintended consequences, and angry constituents. Organizations and institutions are in collapse. The old systems and approaches have outlived their usefulness. And that's the good news. In 2004, Peter Drucker offered that, "The corporation as we know it, which is now 120 years old, is not likely to survive the next 25 years. Legally and financially, yes, but not structurally and economically."

So what does this have to do with generational leadership issues? Here's what we're learning: the new generation doesn't respond to thump and thunder. They don't care so much about rank, title or hierarchy. They do care about working collaboratively. They care about working creatively. And they care about working and leading inclusively. They desire to create workplaces and social groups where everyone can thrive.

Buddhist nun and author Pema Chodron offers, "The whole globe is shook up, so what are you going to do when things are falling apart? You're either going to become more fundamentalist and try to hold things together, or you're going to forsake the old ambitions and goals and live life as an experiment, making it up as you go along."

As we look out now through the windshield of our car, I would like to introduce what I believe are the three most important competencies for leaders in the next decade.

Encourage Balance

In nearly every consulting engagement we do these days, we are asked to address the issue of balance. Our work lives are out of control. Let me tell you a story about a group of women we worked with recently. We were doing a two-day

workshop on women and leadership. One woman, let's call her Kate, shared her story. Kate is a mid-thirties, senior level manager. She's married and has a two year old daughter. Kate goes to work at 6:30 every day and she returns home at 8:00 at night. She rarely sees her daughter. In fact, she told us tearfully that at night, she sits by her daughter's bed and just holds her sleeping hand.

I work with countless numbers of people like Kate, who believe they must put in unbelievably long hours, which they call "face time," to maintain credibility at work, and to be viewed as a strong team player. But what is Kate giving up? Her health, her peace of mind and the privilege of contributing to her young daughter's life.

We are a culture addicted to speed. It's the era of 15-day mortgages and online banking. With all of us rushing around at work in similar fashion, we seem to have forgotten our original purpose, our reason for being there. We no longer say, "I love my work." We are not inspired or uplifted by the contribution we are making. Instead, we have made our work into a kind of muted drudgery. If you are in an executive position, you typically have no "down" time. All waking hours are filled with "busyness." Weekends often slip away into email and playing catch-up. "But," you may counter vehemently, "I hit the deadline!!" I ask only this: Have you ever stopped to wonder why they are called "dead" lines?

Let's slow down. Take a breath. Take stock of your life from the following four perspectives: physical, mental, spiritual and emotional. How are you doing? Are you taking good care of your body? Are you well? Or do you forsake your workouts for getting into the office early? Are you eating well? How are you mentally? Are you able to use your mind as a tool, or does it run you? Are you able to take a break from incessant thinking? Can you quiet yourself long enough to access wisdom and intuition? How is your spiritual life? Are you connecting to something greater than you with enough frequency to give you a sense of purpose and meaning? And how is your emotional life? Many of the clients we work with would say they have strong emotions, but the ones they access most frequently are frustration, irritation, overwhelm! When is the last time you experienced joy, ease, peacefulness?

We know that a leader's "thumbprint" is on the team he or she leads. You can see the "energy" of the leader in the team. Some teams are hurried, hassled, frustrated. Some are more "easy-going" even playful. What does your team look like? We know that as you as leaders focus on restoring balance to your life, you will naturally encourage others to do the same.

We believe that it is only from a place of relative balance that people are able to contribute their best to their work.

We also know that people want to do something great with their lives. To make a difference. "People want to be part of something larger than themselves. They want to be part of something they're really proud of, that they'll fight for, sacrifice for, trust." Howard Shulz, Starbucks. Creativity flows from balance and purpose. Collaboration is possible. There are lots of good reasons to pay attention to balance as a leader.

Make "Work" Play

The second capacity for leaders of the next era is to find ways to make "work" play. People are much more likely to show up for something they think will be fun. The challenge is that most of us have been raised with a protestant ethic and think that "work" has to be hard. Fun is what comes later, after work, after retirement. We have "work" hardwired in our brains as struggle, as something we have to do (as opposed to choose to do). Statistics prove that there are greater numbers of heart attacks and deaths on Monday mornings – ever wonder why?

As Dee Hock, former CEO of Visa said, "The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get the old ones out." This is one of the central challenges of our age. I remember once in an email exchange with two of my male colleagues, one of them wrote, "Let's be ready to march into hell together!" I replied that that didn't sound like very much fun! Marching first and going into hell second! We often use war metaphors to help us describe work – "the battlefield," "losing the battle, but winning the war." If all goes well, very few of the next generations will have experienced a war and these metaphors will not have meaning or relevance. That's good. We can begin to shift our language at work, which amazingly impacts the way we work together.

I've always considered in life that suffering is optional. You can suffer, it's just not much fun. What would it be like if we began to think of work as play? If we played with ideas rather than be so serious? If we brought a sense of light-heartedness? Is it possible? What if laughter was more and more common at work? What if that was the sign that good stuff was getting done? At a design company called, "Ideo" in the Silicon Valley, that is just what they've created. They have made work, play, and they are making a fortune. Nightline featured them a few years ago and since then, other companies have come to visit, to find out how this works, if it works.

Is it time for you to get a new way of thinking about work?

Increase Involvement *(and commitment/allow for chaos)*

The third capacity for leaders of the next era is to increase involvement. We know that stronger companies and healthier communities happen when all people are encouraged and given the opportunity to come together and solve problems. We also know that people are much more committed to decisions they have had a voice in. Those that we fail to invite into the creation process will surely and always show up as resisters and saboteurs. This new way of working inclusively is in direct opposition to the Great Man Myth.

What I've come to realize is that we gather in small groups of people for a reason and that reason is often for control, predictability and order. We all know things are more complicated with more people, with more voices, with more perspectives. It seems easier to make decisions in a smaller group and "roll it out" to the masses. And yet, how many hours and days and weeks and thousands of dollars in consulting fees do we then spend in the "enrollment" process?

Increasingly, there are more and more technologies for high-involvement. We call this getting the whole system in the room. These processes allow for maximum input and make it possible to create order from chaos.

As people gather together, we invite everyone to practice becoming better observers, learners, colleagues, and co-creators. Encouraging curiosity as opposed to judgment and assessment and inviting people to give up control to make room for what wants to happen. These are the skills that make it possible for something new to happen in a team, an organization and a country.

The challenge is to learn and integrate these three important capacities. And to do it soon. You will be served by getting some help and support. As you are able to "retool" your leadership, you will find yourself more and more able to work with all generations. A "suppleness" will return to you.

In our leadership consulting practice, my colleagues and I focus on returning our clients to their "essence" – the fundamental nature of who they are. The greatness they bring when they are at their best. We focus on strengths. And our clients feel returned to clarity, returned to youthfulness, that time when life seemed simpler, more fun.

Along these lines, I would like to share with you a poem by Samuel Ullman: "Youth":

"Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind, it is not a matter of rosy cheeks, red lips and supple knees; it is a matter of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor

of the emotions; it is the freshness of the deep springs of life. Youth means the temperamental predominance of courage over timidity of the appetite, for adventure over the love of ease. This often exists in a person of sixty more than a person of twenty. Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals.

Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, fear, self-distrust bows the heart and turns the spirit back to dust.

Whether sixty or sixteen, there is in every human's heart the lure of wonder, the failing childlike appetite of what's next, and the joy of the game of living. In the center of your heart and my heart there is a wireless station; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, courage and power from others and from the Infinite, so long are you young.

When the aerials are down, and your spirit is covered with snows of cynicism and the ice of pessimism, then you are grown old, even at twenty, but as long as your aerials are up, to catch waves of optimism, there is hope you may die young at eighty."

In closing, we must remember that there is a lot at stake. We have messes to address. The new generation of leaders must learn to encourage balance, to make work fun and creative and to involve many in the creation of projects, processes and initiatives.

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