

DEVELOPING LEADERS

“How is developing me going to help my business make more money?”, “I feel guilty spending all this time concentrating on myself.” These are typical comments from people going through a company-funded process of personal transformation. There seems to be a disconnection between the “real” business issues and the human beings who progress these issues. Culturally it seems OK to concentrate on the issues but somehow self-centered, inappropriate or irrelevant to concentrate on the human beings who are charged with resolving the issues, leading the organization, formulating and enacting the strategy. Somehow we have managed to separate the deed from the doer.

Yet such separation is an illusion. People act out their own inner patterning in every situation in which they operate. INSEAD Professor and Freudian Psychiatrist Manfred Kets de Vries who has been voted by Financial Review, Wirtschaftswoche and Le Capital as one of Europe’s business gurus, claims that we are all just acting out our “inner theatre”. Our mental and emotional patterning shapes the way we make all our decisions, run all our relationships and enact our behavior. Moreover, our inner patterning is largely the outcome of early childhood conditioning and our life experience based on this conditioning. Being mainly unconscious of our own “inner theatre” we usually deny or are simply are unaware of its impact and importance. It is rather horrifying to admit that we are largely prisoners of our own unconscious mind. Nevertheless such a realization is very freeing because it helps us to understand why we do the things we do, make the decisions that we make and attract the responses we do from the environment. The way that I look at it is, while most of our problems appear to be outside of ourselves, the solution is very clearly in our own unconscious patterning. Once we are aware of how and why we operate the way we do, we are in a position to decide whether we want to do what we have always done, think how we have always thought and act as we have always acted, or, change in a way that is more appropriate and effective for our current life situation and stage of development.

Axe Man

It has always intrigued me that people see value in learning skills, but far less value in looking at the patterning they themselves bring to the use of the skills. You can learn to

inappropriately. I have so often seen people use their skills to disserve themselves and their organization - not through malice or lack of talent but through ignorance of their own "inner theatre" and their slavery to psychological patterns of which they chose to be entirely unaware. I worked recently with a client who had great difficulty in delegation. When I probed his background I discovered that as a child he had been largely responsible, not only for himself but for his siblings and his parents, since his mother suffered from ill health and his father was unable to cope with work and child care responsibilities. Now why this particular chap had the internal fortitude to play Atlas for his entire family I do not know, but I do know that having been so steeped in this behavior it was very hard for him to give it up. I also know that when people do surface and deal with lifelong patterns they are freed to go to new heights of personal happiness and professional success. Joe was a Managing Director whose position was endangered. He had lost the respect of his Board and had been asked to find himself a replacement. He couldn't understand why, he had done everything they asked, he had kept everything on an even keel.

Not to be trusted

It was true that his results were good and that he had avoided conflict with the Board at all costs. Ironically that was the problem. They saw him as compliant and weak, easily manipulated and therefore not to be trusted with the oversight of their investments. A quick look into Joe's background showed that he had always been a 'good boy'. An only child he had complied with his parents' wishes and discipline. His parents however had rewarded this behavior, he was now in a situation where his unconsciously patterned behavior was being punished; time to change. Joe had some difficulty being a "raughty" boy but he tried standing his ground, challenging Board decisions and demanding his own way. Miraculously the complaints stopped and he was told that he could discontinue the search for his replacement. Organizations around the world complain that there is a dissonance between what their leaders say and what their leaders do. This can only be true as long as leaders are unaware of their own psychological drivers. These hidden patterns dictate our behavior and our decisions as long as they are unconscious, however we are unable to align them with what we say. We will always send mixed and confusing messages as long as we are unaware of our own 'inner theatre'.

be the best axe man on earth but if you are mad you could well use this talent

trauma, rape or abuse victims for example, will be driven to unlock their inner theatre because the pain of not doing so seems worse than the pain of facing their inner truth. For those in positions of power however, particularly if they are currently on a roll, doing personal work that is emotionally painful is easy to avoid, especially since you can inflict your inadequacies on others and then blame them for lack of performance, poor communication and inadequate understanding. While ever society accepts the myth that we are not driven by our 'inner theatre' and the response it draws from our environment, leaders can go on sending mixed messages, sustaining inappropriate behavior through denying and repressing their awareness and blaming the external environment for their losses. This however is living in la-la land.

Responsible leadership has to involve growing personal awareness and the increased personal responsibility and effectiveness that comes with it. As facing ourselves can be a painful experience we need to accept the legitimacy of employing professional support and expertise in helping us uncover our psychological drivers and making the personal shifts necessary for leadership excellence. We need to also accept that this takes time and that any time applied by leaders to raising their personal awareness is in fact an act of self-sacrifice, done not just for personal gratification but also for the good of the people they lead.

Margot Cairnes

The difficulty is however that uncovering our unconscious patterns is usually hugely personally uncomfortable and disorienting. Those who are in situations of personal

