

# What is Ideal Leadership?

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### Purpose

I am by no means a spiritual person. However, I believe that strong leadership begins with an understanding of who we are. Once we define our reality tunnel, we are more capable of determining who we are as a person and as a leader. With this, leaders can then show a greater concern for the people they lead as well as the products they produce. Without a stronger connection to the people, it dehumanizes work. However, it is not uncommon for leaders to have a strong bond with all their staff starting with the cleaning people. It is obvious the ‘strongman model’ of management is no longer the best practice. Management requires a connection to spirituality and to our heart. This paper will divulge on my background, my spiritual journey, and my framework for ideal leadership.

### Background

I began this course with a purpose; I wanted to find some spirituality. As Hawley (1993) notes, spirituality is a goal more than a path and is meant for an individual as a personal, private journey. It is an inquiry into my true self and with that my journey began. I had no expectations whatsoever coming into this course. At first, I registered into another course in Performance Consulting. Its primary focus is on business practices, which I am interested in. Most summers, I also run a basketball camp; however, the ‘Spirituality in Inspired Leadership’ happened to coincide with the camp. Coincidentally, the camp fell through because of the lack of availability of gym space. As a result, at the last minute I change my Performance Consulting course to the Spirituality in Inspired Leadership course. It was a big disappointment when I found out that the course was full. Nevertheless, I was persistent in logging in every morning to the registrar’s web site to see if by chance I would be accepted. Three weeks before the

course was to begin, I finally lucked out. I was given the opportunity to study at the University of Calgary campus. This would be my first on-campus MED course and luckily it fit perfectly into my brother in laws wedding in Calgary. Thus my spiritual journey began.

I was raised in an immigrant Chinese family. Our only relatives when we arrived in Canada were my father's stepbrothers. I was taught at a young age that in order to be successful in Canada, I had to be better than my Caucasian counterparts. As I was the oldest boy, I had the duty to "carry the family line, obey their parents in every matter, and take care of them in old age" (Hoff, 1993, p33). In order to shine and be recognized, I was motivated to learn and to continue learning. Being raised in East Vancouver and not knowing any English at the time, I quickly grasped the English language although even today I still make the same subject verb agreement mistakes. I remembered being pushed by my mother to recite the timetable in Chinese. The rhythmic sounds from the reciting obviously got ingrained into my subconscious, as math was not a problem. In primary school, I made all the sports teams at school although I rarely would play because of my lack of understanding of the game. I did, however, have speed and work ethic. It probably did not help that my father was never around to show me the intricacies of the different sports with his hectic working schedule. I was an honour student who maintain an A average with ease. The only trouble I found myself in was the time when I was roughhousing with some other boys and got shoved into a smaller boy, which consequently broke his umbrella. The teacher took it out on me and called my parents and made a big deal out of nothing. Boys push each other when they are ten and accidents happen. I was brought before the parent of the small kid and made to

apologize. My mother was a strong person who demanded discipline. She kept the change purse and was the authoritarian person in my life. She would require my brothers and sisters to attend Chinese school everyday. This school was situated in Chinatown and was a thirty-minute bus ride. We dreaded these classes as they were taught by old Chinese teachers whose ability to lecture were overshadowed by their bad breath. However, this was where we developed our freedom. We walk to the bus stop and rode the buses from the East side of Vancouver to the poverty-ridden side of Chinatown. Here we met the lowest of low people, cheated the bus system to buy junk food, and took in the most wonderful views that the Greater Vancouver Regional Transit Authority could offer.

In my teenage years, I was awkward, but found a niche in sports. I became better aware of positional responsibilities and found myself leading teams as well as leading the school on the student council. Playing sports gave a lot of meaning to my life. However, my mother who was always the Eeyore in the family, the one with the “It won’t work, so why try mentality” (Hoff, 1993, p56),” did not feel sports was the way to put food on the plate when I was older. These exact words caused much grief in my teenage years. As a rebellious teenager, school was easy; however, participating in sports activities without my parents knowing was more difficult. I would lie and lie some more to be involved in sports. There was a time when I was locked out of my house because of my mother’s displeasure of finding out from my brother that I was playing sports at school and not studying as I had mentioned to her. The value that sports did provide me was a greater appreciation of hard work. It also kept my pride and self esteem in check. These characteristics have followed me to my work. I am a person who takes pride in what I do

which is the reason I believe in doing things right the first time around. I am a stickler to details and can be consumed by this if not for my ego. This is also a time when my false sense of who I am is fully visible: “Man is not important for his ego and personality. He is important because as a soul, he is a part of God” (Kriyananda, 1991, p11). As a human being, we need to recognize our place on earth. “Our native country is Omnipresence. On earth we are but travelers – guests on a brief visit. Many times, it is my wife ‘my reality’ who knocks the sense into me. My need to monopolize only makes me an “undesirable guest” (Kriyananda, 1991, p7). I do not have selfish intentions, but merely have the need to dominate. My entrepreneurial spirit is my strongest asset. I believe that even though we are doing well at something, my thoughts always goes to how we could do it even better. This type of spirit drives me to paths that are less traveled. At my school, I enjoy coaching and technology. My basketball teams since I began teaching at this school have won local as well as district championships. In teaching, I have incorporated technology as part my daily routine. The school web site was re-design by students under my guidance. The yearbook was transformed from a dull pictograph of the school year to one that has a voice.

I am a very fortunate person in that I have supportive families on both sides. I met my wife in Japan, a place that both of us found foreign. Japan, a country that is very homogeneous, does not recognize the rights of foreigners. Even foreigners who are born there do not have recognition as citizens. As both of us were Canadians, we found we shared a common bond. As an Asian looking person in Japan who spoke little Japanese, I found myself being shunned on many occasions. This was also the time when I found a true appreciation of my own Chinese heritage. When I was growing up, my Chinese

heritage and traditions were unimportant in the face of all the Western influences. In fact, I was embarrassed with some of the things my parents did. Bringing a hot Chinese lunch to school almost devastated me in grade one. Although it was probably more nutritious and enjoyable, I preferred a peanut butter and jelly sandwich because that was what was common in the lunchroom. I realized at a young age that I needed to assimilate in order to be accepted. This was where the clash of my two cultures occurred. I felt the need to act and behave as a Westerner. Moreover, I carried a deep resentment of my ancestry yet this all changed in Japan. The fact that I was in a foreign land, a place where people valued their own culture triggered a spiritual soul searching of who I was. The emotional loneliness I experienced allowed my “mind power to enlighten my soul” (Kriyananda, 1991, p1). Too often “we are too busy coveting and rushing after the There and Later on” that we fail to see what is right in front of us and what’s coming from that (Hoff, 1993, p127). In retrospect, my trip overseas was a time of self-realization. Without the safety net of my family allowed for a true discovery of myself. Seeing all the Japanese people having so much pride of their culture and nation gave me a real appreciation of my own culture. This self-realization meant “realizing my true Self as the great ocean of Spirit, by breaking the delusion that I am this little ego, this little human body, and personality” (Kriyananda, 1991, p28). I am after all only a small part in this cosmic universe we call earth.

I married a Canadian born Irish Norwegian woman. Although we are both Canadians, our background and ideals clash at time. My wife is a person who turns the negative into positive and attracts positive with positive (Hoff, 1993, p234). To illustrate, she does not let the little things bother her and is quick to show her appreciation of other

people and things. “When we give up our image of self importance and our ideas of what should be, then we help things become what they need to be” (Hoff, 1993, p235). She finds ‘good’ in everyone she meets. She is one who looks and sees beauty. As Jones (2003) pointed out, when a drunk placed his arms around the Master, he did not find it to be uncomfortable although there was great concern from his disciples. The Yogananda was a person who looked and saw beauty in everyone. I find myself the stubborn one in the relationship whereas she is the one with the common sense. Although I am quite a happy person by nature, it is during emotional times that I succumb to my immaturity and use blame to deflect what is going wrong. As Hoff (1993, p57) mentions, “reality is what one makes it. And the more negative reality one nurtures and creates the more of it one has. As partners, we have great love for life, our son, and our families. We are interracial couple yet we share a common belief in being frugal, being goal oriented, being family oriented, and having a love for life. Having a child has given both a greater zest for life. Our selflessness in providing for our child in good and bad times has made me realize that there is more to life than our own egos. “To live irresponsibly is to live for the ego, not for God. The greater a person’s emphasis on ego-fulfillment, the less his awareness of true joy” (Kriyananda, 1991, p44). In that respect, I am content. However, like Tigger, I am an over-enthusiast who is always in a constant search to improve my family and myself. Unlike Tigger, I finish what I start.

### My Spiritual Journey

I arrived in Calgary on Saturday the 29th. In the Vietnamese culture, nine or any combination of numbers that add up to nine is considered lucky. It started to look that way when we were given the front seat with extended legroom and when our luggage came off the conveyor belt first. Moreover, a woman gave me her seat to be with my



family. This was definitely karma. My next destination was the Church where I got married in. This was a purposeful trip, as I know how much power the church brings to the heart. When I walked into the church, I was put to ease with all the positive energy. This ‘positive transformation’ as Hoff (1993, p241) explains incorporates good attitudes and values, something we all have. I am not a Catholic; however, I do occasionally attend church with my family. My wife’s mother’s was raised in an Irish Catholic household. This explains the strong faith that all her siblings feel for God. Conversely, I grew up in a Buddhist household where strict Confucian values were adhered. Although, my parents were not practising Buddhists, they adhered to the traditions during holidays and were “connected to everyday living things” (Hoff, 1993, p145). They had a cosmic connection to all that surrounded them. Buying a house meant location according to the art of Feng Shui. Coming from Asia, practicality meant that everything was accounted for and done for a reason. The Chinese are very practical people - they have no respect for things that sound good, but don’t work (Hoff, 1993, p145). As a result, extracurricular activities such as vacations that were meant to be fun were not common in my household. Fun did not equate to hard work.

Since my wife works in the Catholic school system, she is required to be a practising Catholic. She has told me on numerous times the camaraderie she experiences. It is unpretentious and caring. She compared this relationship to the brotherhood of the police and firefighters who are known for their unbreakable bond on and off the job. They share a true bond with each other because of their dependence on each other for safety. Teaching is not that kind of profession. We primarily work alone with some collaboration during school wide events. However, with her school, there is a shared

spirituality. Everyone holds a common belief of God. They also practice a common theme for each year of school. Themes such as ‘Kindle the Fires of Hope and Joy’ and ‘Blessed our Peacekeepers’ allow for deeper exploration of the vision of the school and of the Church. With that there is a shared spirituality that encompasses the school, Church, and the community making it a true partnership in the education children. As a staff, many of the decisions they make come from intuition, “the soul’s power of knowing God” (Kriyananda, 1991, p31). This is the true basis of religion.

I, on the other hand, work for the public system. Most of us who work in this type of establishment do not have the same common bond that the Catholic schools do. Although our goal is to improve learning of the children, we sometimes fail to look at the whole picture. As a profession, we are not good at collaboration. Teachers are self-promoters although we try very hard to be collegial. We direct what students study and learn hoping we turn the children into good community citizens. However, many times these goals are unrealistic, as the product is emphasized more than the process. “Unenlightened teachers often try to impose their will on the disciples. Freedom can never be achieved in this way even if the advice given is essentially valid” (Kriyananda, 1991, p134).

I have tried to find my spirituality before. As I was growing up, we were not a poor family, but we were frugal. Eating out was rare and birthday and Christmas presents were not existent. When I saw other children experiencing the great joy of receiving, I wanted this experience as well. This materialistic side of our culture weakened my spirituality. I focused all my energy into getting the things that I wanted. There was not a real need to own a nice car or go on a nice holiday, yet my energy was

directed to possession of these material riches. However, I did not see these things as making my life full so when my friend proposed that I join him on a missionary to Mexico I jumped at the chance to see what this had to offer. At first I was reluctant to join in any prayer sessions as it made me feel uncomfortable. I did not need anybody praying for me or worse yet, pushing their religion on me. However, as time passed, it was nice to feel the togetherness of our group following a similar goal in finding spirituality. “It is spiritual poverty, not material lack, that lies at the core of all human suffering” (Kriyananda, 1991, p3). My work at an orphanage opened my eyes to how happy some children are without the material riches. I was delighted to play soccer with children without shoes and enjoy the company of children without a family. Through their kindness and enthusiasm, I saw that “possession of material riches, without inner peace, is like dying of thirst while bathing in a lake” (Kriyananda, 1991, p3). We are in an “Abstract Value society, one in which things are not appreciated for what they are so much as for what they represent” (Hoff, 1993, p126). What I also discovered on this trip was as an individual it is more difficult to follow a strict regiment of finding spirituality. With a group, it not only brings together a common bond as well as a common purpose.

My spirituality has grown since this time. I have attended church occasionally with my family, read into this interesting topic, and have even watched Oprah to ‘Remember my Spirit’. The church has given me a chance to be with my family and to hear some words that enlightens my soul. The homily that I heard at the service that I attended when I arrived in Calgary reaffirmed my belief on our role on earth. The priest gave a story of a father who worked a hard day and was relaxing on the sofa reading his newspaper. His little boy was excited to see his father and wanted him to play. The

father explained to him that he was really tired and suggested that he do something else.

When that failed, the father gave the boy a rip up map of the world to put back together as a puzzle. A little time later, the boy returned and told his father he was finish. The father, a little surprised, asked how he finished it so quickly. The little boy without hesitation told his father that there was a picture of a man on the back of the map. When the image of man came together, so did the world. This little story tells of how each of us make up the world we live in. Hoff (1993, p13) tells of how man thousands of years ago worked side by side with the earth angels and nature spirits with whom he shared responsibility for taking care of the world. The notion that all of us make up the whole really makes sense. Reading my first spirituality book, ‘The Celestine Prophecy’, gave me a sense that all things have purpose. Meeting someone repeatedly meant that there was a cosmic connection that should be looked into further. Redfield mentions a new consciousness that will allow people to tap into their psychic or intuitive skills giving them a better chance to discover and live their true purpose in life. I found the book lacked depth, but contained somewhat of a plot and a story line. I did skim his next book the ‘Tenth Insight’ and found it had the same metaphorical message. There is a “weariness of rationalism, ideological disorientation, existential angst, hunger for mystery, mourning for God, the desire for hope and purpose, and human goodness” (Moyle, 1999). Watching Oprah, on the other hand, has rekindled my love for humanity. Although, watching Oprah was done out of necessity at first as my wife had a firm grip on the remote, soon I found her programming had a clear message. Oprah brings about a show that shows the good in humanity giving us a message to ‘Remember your Spirit’. It is a feel good show, which makes me want to do something good after the show. My

experience with church, with spiritual literature, and with spiritual images together makes up my spiritual journey.

### My Framework for Ideal Leadership

I work in a secondary school setting. In these walls, great leaders must have a vision and use the vision to create a caring school culture. Creating a workplace where human spirit and compassion is valued makes for a happy workplace. A master leader is one that can frame his roles within the context they lead. When this happens, it perpetuates ‘effortless action’. When a stream come to some stones in its path, it doesn’t struggle to remove them, or fight against them, or think about them. It just goes around them. And as it does, it sings. Water responds to What’s There with effortless action” (Hoff, 1993, p157). This metaphoric analogy of effortless action really transcends to how we fit into the big picture. “Carefully observe the natural laws around you and live by them. From following them, you will learn morality of modesty, moderation, compassion, consideration, the wisdom of seeing things as they are, and the happiness of being in harmony with the Way” (Hoff, 1993, p155). When we begin to see that everything has a purpose, we tend not waste our emotional energy on perceived threats.

Inspired leadership is more than this. It requires deeper reflection of who I am and where I came from. When our soul opposes our ego, which happens during times of emotional turmoil, we recall the truth in within our consciousness and live it. This is where we ask the question, “What should I do?” Leadership is a dirty job. When leaders are faced with controversy, it requires common sense and intuition. “Faith is different from belief. Faith is rooted in experience. Belief is provisional faith” (Kriyananda, 1991, p31). My father in law is a food and beverage manager and has owned hotels in the past.

He works long hours and has a strong understanding of the industry. The food and beverage industry exists on service. People provide service. Therefore, having strong people skills is a requirement. Intuition plays a large role in finding the right person for the job. However, finding quality people is difficult task because the industry is very transient. It is remarkable that there have been some people who have worked for him for a long time and have continued to work for him when he changed locations. My father is a no nonsense person who puts a great deal of faith in the people who works for him. He “sees situations for what they are and don’t turn difficulties that aren’t there thus creating more difficulties in the process. Doing this is wasting energy. Or as the Chinese saying puts it, Painting legs on snake” (Hoff, 1993, p171). He is approachable and displays a humanistic side. From a modest man who was once a bartender to a respectable community minded businessman, my father in law has learned to build relationships and encouraged others with his heart. Leaders who approach others with a caring and “Do What We Say What We Do” attitude will find that more mutual respect in an environment where turmoil is the norm. When we begin to really care about the people we lead, the transparency of our actions and our words will inspire those that we lead.

Am I an inspired leader? As a leader in my school, I set high expectations for myself as well as others. This extends from my family to my friends to my colleagues, and to my students. I try to ‘raise the bar’ in whatever I do and am prepared to rock the boat in order to make things happen. Taking risks does not scare me as I have always found ways to overcome them. When I was unemployed after teaching in Asia, I started a company putting together online photos for rental properties. I am driven by

improvement and not by status quo. As I have got older and started a family, I have been less concerned with what everyone says or does, but have given more priority to my family and myself. “People live too much vicariously, in the opinions of other. If you want to have life and have it more abundantly, as Jesus taught, you must begin by living your own life, not of anyone else” (Kriyananda, 1991, p11-12). My wife has been a guiding force in my life. She has given me a different outlook on life. She is easy going and is very good with her words. She can make a person feel absolutely terrible or absolutely terrific without lifting her finger. I admire her wit, her eloquence with her words, and her selflessness. I would not be the person I am without the inspiration and self sacrifices that my family has given me. A truly inspired leader requires this as well as a balance of common sense and intuition. A deeper understanding of our consciousness allows us to be a more compassionate servant leader. This along with our desire to leave our place a better place than we found it is what true leaders aspire. Having role models that we have come to know always reinforces our ideals of what true inspired leaders are. When I look at all the people who have come into my life, it is clear that each of them have touched me in some way in my growth as a person and a leader. It is no doubt that in the course of finding my spirituality that I have found a new respect for the spiritual as well as the physical world. The words from Lao-tse holds true, “Honour all under heaven as your body” (Hoff, 1993, p155).

#### Resources

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