



Seeing True to Break Through

Thoughts from Ron Chapman

March 2009

Greetings!

The last few months have been filled with interesting and thought provoking correspondence with some of you regarding the “upper” levels of leadership, those that exist as we overcome our limited and self-focused perspectives.

One question has been asked several times: What is it to transcend oneself?

There’s an easy example for anyone who has ever had a child. A moment comes when one realizes there is someone else in need of our attentions, and their needs trump our own. This is even true for those who become caregivers for a child, whether as a foster parent, a teacher or even a baby sitter.

So what might that look like as a leader, or even as a human being engaged in the activities of the day?

Returning to last month’s convention of levels of leadership, from a Level 4 perspective it would be a focus on meeting the needs of others first and foremost. Personal needs and desires would be secondary. This is the servant leader model.

With a Level 5 perspective, principles would be our most significant interest. Those principles could run the gamut from a private sector passion for organizational success to non-profit zeal to overcome a social ill, or even the desire to perpetuate democratic values as a public sector necessity, or even an abiding desire to create a highly nurturing family system.

From correspondence with one reader, I’d like to hypothesize there is in fact a Level 6 perspective that takes human based principles to a transcendence beyond. Perhaps once we’ve learned to focus on others, and then at the level of principle, there emerges a sort of “super principle” we’ve typically associated with spiritual leaders.

Let’s look at a comparison to see more clearly. Some would say that the former CEO of GE, Jack Welch, was a Level 5 leader because he embodied a principle of success and a passion to excel. Yet there is a difference from that level of what we might call “human scale principles,” and a leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr. who had a zeal for “spiritual principles” of equity and fairness.

Regardless, all these perspectives have in common a vantage point of focus on and investment in something larger than oneself. Indeed, it is exactly that valuing of something beyond ourselves that produces a movement of ego transcendence as a human or as a leader. At the moment we perceive greater value in something beyond ourselves, magically our efforts turn toward its realization rather than our self-realization. As one psycho-spiritual guru said, "If you want to know what you value, look at what you pursue." We always act consistently with our most strongly held values. So what we seek is always a good reflection of what we value.

How might these ideas appear in a practical human scale? Just consider a common enough tale of self-absorbed adolescence, which gives way to concerns for family and career, that then lays the foundation for leadership or social involvements, which often gives birth to spiritual or communal pursuits as we grow older.

Let's make one more point before concluding for this month. Often our transitions come out of crisis. It seems that the psychic shock of challenge or difficulty can provide a new vantage point. Isn't it true that most of us view some arduous transition as life defining?

One quick reminder. There is no guarantee one will transcend oneself. Simply showing up for our lives and growing older guarantees nothing. But there are ways to find new values which can propel us forward. Remember, what we value dictates our interests and actions. Next month, we'll explore revaluing.

Until then, all the best ... and remember ... the good is the enemy of the best.

Ron

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