

Intelligent, but not wise – why some leaders are failing

"Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom." - Charles Haddon Spurgeon

As businesses continue to face challenging and uncertain times, more and more leaders are leaving – either of their own accord, or being shown the door. While many have lost their way due to egregious moral and ethical missteps, just as many are facing a dead end due to their inability to see the big picture from a higher not-so-common perspective. Many of these leaders are intelligent, but, unfortunately, not wise.

"We thought, because we had power, we had wisdom." - Stephen Vincent Benet

Our minds work on two levels - a lower level and a higher level. The lower level deals with the concrete – our immediate physical environment and reality, information, facts and logic. Accessing the lower mind, we move through our day as aware, conceptual and reflective. Our lower mind is rational, analytical, opinionated, busy and most often skeptical. It is bound by time and space. We use our lower mind to make sense of our complicated and emotional world. The lower mind is the stuff of MBAs, business school and "operations-focused" education and experiential learning.

"Wisdom is what's left after we've run out of personal opinions." - Cullen Hightower

The lower mind brings one to reductionist thinking and mechanistic, conventional approaches to life and living. The main drawback of living in one's lower mind consistently is that the lower mind represents one's internal map of reality. It's like being stuck in your own intellectual zip code, never moving beyond your nine-digit thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, worldviews, premises, etc. It's like living in one town, knowing it completely, and never venturing outside the borders of that town. Intelligent leaders are usually engaged with their lower mind, and, relatedly, left-brain thinking. The lower mind focuses on the corner of the painting. Wisdom does not arise from this place.

The higher mind deals with the abstract, that accesses intuition, aspiration, heart, soul and spirit. Our higher mind connects with the Universal mind, the impersonal and abstract realms and with Universal truth, beauty and goodness. Our higher mind speaks in the language of ideas, ideals, symbols, principles, archetypes and impulses. It is intuitive, and guides us to the truth. It is loving and universal. The higher mind see the threads woven between the mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, environmental and social aspects of our life. The higher mind see the entire painting - the place where wisdom arises.

"Our own physical body possesses a wisdom which we who inhabit the body lack." - Henry Miller

Wise leaders live their actuality and their potential – accessing both their lower and higher minds. Wise leaders understand they are spiritual beings living in a human form and allow their lower minds to access their higher. Allowing their higher mind supports the wise leader to access intuition and impressions that give one insights into the larger picture of life. Wise leaders understand the importance of focus, presence, self-discipline, meditation, study, loving service and creative expression. They seem to consistently seek to grasp the next higher level of awareness. They venture outside their historical map of reality – willing to jettison their old, "safe" beliefs, assumptions, expectations, worldviews, etc., and explore the possible and the unknown. They're open to knowing what they don't know.

Wise leaders understand that spiritual and personal growth means connecting with higher concepts and energies such as values, ideas, ideals, potentials, archetypes, higher guidance and intuition. The wise leader develops the capacity to not only connect with these higher concepts, but, as importantly, seek to

ground them into forms, tasks, projects, relationships, and details, etc., that inform the way they lead in their day-to-day life at work. Wise leaders don't stop with experience, but transcend experience, both their own and others', in a way that they spend an appreciative amount of time and energy in deep self-reflection and thoughtful consideration around their experience, leading to higher insights, enhanced value and a deeper sense of self-awareness.

"We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us." - Marcel Proust

Wise leadership is not about having experiences, but consciously learning from those experiences. The process of learning from experience engages one in a process of inquiry – looking with curiosity, not judgment, into the who, what, when, where, how and, most importantly, the why of their experiences. Inquiry is a matter of punctuation; it's about question marks, not periods. Curiosity.

Wise leaders understand the connection between diverse, and seemingly disconnected, elements to create something new. Wise leaders are adept at using analogy and metaphor and seek to recognize patterns, spot trends, draw connections and discern the big picture even when, at first glance, there seem to be nothing there. A wise leader interacts with her world in terms of a richer and more varied spectrum of possibilities and opportunities. A wise leader understands the importance of relationships, human and otherwise. A wise leader is a systems thinker, a gestalt thinker a holistic thinker. Wise leaders are comfortable being oriented to their right brain, as well as to their heart and soul.

Inquiry, for the wise leader, is not about "futurizing the past" – using their past experiences, the known, the tried and true to explain present experiences that are un-common, un-usual, un-familiar. Inquiry involves delving deeply into the self, even parts of the self that, heretofore, might have been unknown, in order to search for new insights, perspectives and understanding – seeking familiarity with the unknown.

"To make no mistakes is not in the power of man; but from their errors and mistakes the wise and good learn wisdom for the future." - Plutarch

Inquiry means creating an internal space, a space unencumbered by one's old thoughts, beliefs, premises, stories, worldviews, solutions, etc. - a clear, inviting and open space and entering into a fresh "new" realm, without preconception or expectation, to be informed with new learning, new sense, new meaning, new WHYs and new HOWs, i.e., new clarity - new wisdom.

Many intelligent leaders don't know they aren't wise. Here are some indications to help them see where there's room for wisdom-making:

- They are task-oriented and focused on short-term gains, i.e, the corner of the painting, and often fail to step back and view the painting from 25 miles out – the painting being their respective business and their respective profession/industry.
- They choose to limit alternatives when engaged in analysis. They fear ambiguity and are closed to myriad possibilities and perspectives; they fear the unknown and taking risks. They buckle under stress and tend to back away from challenges.
- They are linear thinkers and feel they must be rational and logical. They are unable or unwilling to allow their "gut" or intuition to inform their decision-making process.
- They can't or won't act "for the common good" when they are faced with conflict between or among multiple parties, or differing priorities. They refuse to consider "right action" or the well-being of the group, team or community in favor of relying on the conventional or prevailing attitude or perspective, or their own personal goals.
- They have no deep sense of self-awareness, and lack spiritual and emotional intelligence. They focus on their strengths, deny their weaknesses and never allow their emotions to surface.

- They lack a people-orientation. They can't be bothered making an effort to see others from a personal (as opposed to a functional) perspective. They don't know how to, or are unwilling to, deal with others' emotions, or emotional well-being. Relationship building is not their forte, by choice.
- They lack harmony – there is no alignment or congruence between what they think, feel, say and do.

"Not by age but by capacity is wisdom acquired. Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" - T. S. Eliot

When we reflect and contemplate from a deeper level, when we choose to "go inside" and honestly, sincerely and self-responsibly ask ourselves if our stories are true, we are using our higher mind and engaging the wisdom of our heart and soul. Relying on our heart and soul's inner wisdom and intelligence open us up to new ways of seeing, do-ing and be-ing – discovering and exploring new territory and new maps of reality, new zip codes – supporting us to understand and deal with today's uncommon challenges in new ways.

Using one's higher mind is what will support today's intelligent leaders to become tomorrow's wise leaders.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Would you characterize yourself as largely "left-brained?" What would others say about you?
- Do you consider yourself "emotionally intelligent?" On a scale of 1-10, how emotionally intelligent are you? What would your close friends and co-workers say? Would you feel comfortable asking them? If not, why not?
- Is your organization using its "higher mind" as it considers strategies to deal with future challenges?
- Do you consider your leaders to be "wise?" How about you? Are you a "wise" soul? How do you know?
- What was your experience of "wisdom" as you were growing up? Was engaging with the "unknown" a way of being, or were you encouraged to engage with life in a safe and secure mode?
- How often do you take time to seriously and deeply reflect on your life's experiences?
- Would you say you are a "task-oriented" or "people-oriented" person at work? How about at home? Would others agree?
- Would you generally rather be right or happy? Why?
- How do you deal with the unknown?
- Can you envision a world at work where people are regularly encouraged to take time out for meditation, self-reflection and discovery?

"The best mind might be the wisest mind if it were a mind alone that produces wisdom." - (anonymous)

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