

INTEGRAL COACHING AS SERVANT LEADERSHIP

(excerpted from "Integral Leadership Coaching: A Partner in Sustainability" by Lloyd Raines, published March 2007, Integral Leadership Review.)

ABSTRACT

Robert Greenleaf (1970) took an innovative position on leadership, setting forth a new framework called "servant leadership." The essence of leadership, said Greenleaf, is the desire to serve one another and to serve something beyond ourselves, a higher purpose. My sense is that this larger context is the defining narrative of our work as coaches and leaders, and it begs to be with us, a voice of conscience bearing witness, taking note of what is in front of us, and bringing this awareness into our conversations as we lead and coach. Anything less is a convenient paring down of the bigness of the story we live in.

KEY WORDS

Servant Leadership
Higher Purpose
Milton Friedman
Motivation
Too Big to Fail
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Triple Bottomline
Social Responsibility
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Organizational Values

CATEGORIES

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Ethics
Leadership
Trust

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Ultimately, our self-interested, short-term motivations come back to bite us hard. Short-term benefits for some at the expense of many, lacks a moral maturity. We may do well to study anew the basic connections between things: What depends upon what? Who depends upon whom? Many indigenous people have understood the connections between the individual, community, nature, and cosmos in ways our culture and institutions have forgotten. We remain in peril because of that forgetting and the fragmented worldview that incapacitates our abilities to see what needs to be seen, and do what needs to be done.

How Is Integral Coaching Different?

The business world contains a spectrum of enterprises with diverse motivations or drives for doing business. They operate in a marketplace still strongly following Milton Friedman’s dictum that the sole responsibility of business is to maximize profits for shareholders (Friedman, 1962, p. 133):

...there is one and only one social responsibility of business — to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.

Friedman presents an elegant principle, which, at the same time, is brutal in its disconnection from a sense of stewardship or care — except care for maximizing profit for owners. Taken to its logical end, this principle despoils the social and ecological commons, consumes free market forces through ever-increasing concentration of wealth (and market power), while eroding its own defining principle of maximizing individual liberty and minimizing coercion. We have seen this in the collapse of financial organizations “too big to fail” due to highly reckless and speculative investments. Now those huge firms that absorbed the failed firms are even bigger than those “too big to fail” and have been given nearly a trillion dollars to use as they see fit.

Fortunately, many companies have chosen to lead their businesses in an opposite direction from that championed by Friedman. And they are doing so from an enlightened self-interest, creating a business philosophy that is socially and environmentally responsible while also concerned with profitability. Far from being weakened by these additional dimensions of care, their businesses prosper. They call themselves socially responsible, green, or triple bottom line businesses and include a growing presence in the Fortune 100 and 500. Their agenda is to be good business people while also being good corporate citizens in the world.

In a parallel sense, what I'm proposing in this article is that leadership coaching benefits too from being socially and environmentally responsible. (To get the logic of this, imagine the opposite proposition: "Leadership coaching should not be concerned with social and environmental responsibility." Or, "Leadership coaching should be non-judgmental regarding social and environmental health and well-being.") Social and environmental responsibility, we are beginning to see more clearly, are interdependent with and ultimately inseparable from financial ventures that are sustainable. This kind of coaching cultivates a profoundly different way of seeing our relationships with each other, how we work and live, and how we live within nature.

Coaching from a holistic lens is analogous to holistic medicine. Holistic medicine and specialized medicine (like holistic coaching and specialized coaching), are both powerful and, I think, needed. As a person, I want to understand my health from a holistic perspective and, likewise, have a doctor or practitioner assess my conditions from that perspective. Yet, I also want to be able to call on specialists in particular areas so that I can get as well-informed as possible before taking big steps in any direction with my health.

For the consumer, holistic medicine has the huge advantage of being proactive in its approach; while traditional medicine and specialized medicine tends to be reactive. A holistic perspective of anything enables greater understanding of the complex factors affecting the ecology of any particular thing as a part of larger systems. When understood in that way, choices expand dramatically and proactive strategic decisions can be made and actions taken regarding the long-term health and well being of an individual, social groups, economies, nations, the global community, and the environment.

When I began coaching leaders and executives, I had the scaffolding of an integral perspective and practice. But, I found I had much work to do. I had to deepen my knowledge of the

business world, its processes, the markets, and jargon through self-study and communities of learning. I had to deepen my understanding of how the market's natural dynamics led to the ignoring of the "ecological commons." And, at the same time, I was engaging in a pretty comprehensive integral scan of myself, plugging the gaps in my integrity as a person and steward of vital resources in my domains of living and working. What the integral framework does is to make that scan disciplined, simple, fast, and applicable immediately. And it enables me to see my part in harmful outcomes, whether intended or not. This awareness humbles me and keeps my critical faculties most sharply focused on my own choices and behaviors. To be engaged in holistic coaching, I must be actively engaged with similar areas of development in myself. The cobbler, so to speak, must be walking in decently maintained shoes.

Integral Coaching, Holistic Leadership

My intention in integral coaching is to help cultivate the best capacities in a leader around responsible, intelligent, resilient, and wise stewardship of vital resources. At the core of stewardship is a commitment to the dignity of people and the vitality of nature as reflected in leadership values and behaviors, organizational culture, relationships with stakeholders, and the design of organizational systems.

For coaches, leadership coaching is an extraordinary "opening," by design, to contribute to the learning edge of leaders. We help leaders to coax from themselves their human potential, wisdom, and courage, and, in turn, to understand how to cultivate that in others.

What else is integral leadership? Integral leaders know how to craft and continually tell meaningful stories about the organization while intentionally embedding that story into the culture of the organization. That includes the actual architectural design (or modifications) of the building and its infrastructure, the business

ownership structure, the organizational structure, and the design of systems, processes, and job functions. The entire anatomy of the organization, therefore, expresses the organization's core identity (values, principles, vision, mission), tone of relationships (top down, collaborative, matrix, learning community), and ways of accessing and sharing information (from

carefully restricted on a need to know basis to complete transparency). When done well, the stories and design will stimulate and strengthen people's dignity, meaning, and community while stimulating innovations that deliver solid value to shareholders. From the confluence of these interdependent elements the organization's culture is shaped.