

A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

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WE ARE AT A CROSSROADS in our evolution. Like all evolution, circumstances are a big factor. We now

possess the ability to rapidly go extinct. Unlike dinosaurs and other extinct species, we humans possess consciousness. We have the ability to think differently and make choices that influence our ability to remain viable inhabitants of Earth.

Presently, we have a major choice before us with regards to the challenges facing us as a global society. We can choose the pathological approach, fixing problems as they arise. The problem with this approach is we are living in a time when our ability to clean up after ourselves is insufficient for the sheer volume and scale of the problems we've created. While this has been the traditional way we've dealt with problems until now, it is no longer viable. Technology has enabled us to do more harm, faster and faster, and our thinking hasn't kept pace.

The alternative choice would be to take the transformational approach – a non-linear adventure into shifting the

paradigm of human consciousness. This requires a completely different worldview based upon new assumptions, values and attitudes. We are at stage in our maturation as a species when this is now the only viable approach to having a sustainable presence on this planet. To achieve this, we must grow up – to become more mature in the way we interact with each other and our environment.

Global events of the past decade have made it painfully evident we are still in an adolescent phase of our evolution. We continue trying to resolve our differences through force, which further divides us, while technology makes it easier and easier to do great harm. We continue giving legitimacy to systems that are dysfunctional rather than standing tall for long-term approaches to achieving a sustainable future. We have been spending like there is no tomorrow and feeling invincible while we indulge ourselves. Doesn't this sound like teenage behavior?

Continuing to think and behave like we have in the past is contrary to our best interest in the longer term. Working collaboratively appears to be both impractical and unattainable. This

apparent stalemate contributes to our becoming a resigned, impotent global population. Not only are we thinking and acting like spoiled adolescents, we also feel helpless about doing anything differently. Isn't this a sad state?

We can overcome this malaise of impotency by shifting our consciousness and following those who can envision transcending our present day conditions and creating new realities based upon new assumptions, attitudes and values.

«Conscious leadership» is the term coined several years back to communicate a more enlightened form of leadership, particularly applicable in the complex world we have created. We need a new kind of leadership to lead people, organizations and society through these critical junctures, determining the future our children and grandchildren will inherit. I call it «conscious» because our circumstances call for a higher state of consciousness – a state of mind that includes heightened awareness of what is needed for the

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“We have trained men to think of the Future as a promised land which favoured heroes to attain – not as something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.”

C.S. LEWIS

whole of humanity *and* responsible action – both being held in a sacred context. To paraphrase His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the more clearly people see their predicament – that their fates are inextricably tied together and that all life is a mutually interdependent web of relations – “universal responsibility” then becomes the only sane choice.

Let us look at the dilemma facing humanity as a precipice rather than a crossroads. On the other side of the great chasm before us lies enormous possibility for humanity, all the things we dream about. Yet given the unknown dangers and apparently treacherous barriers that lie between the cliffs of today and the shores of tomorrow, the present situation can appear hopeless and impossible. But wait! Is that *really* true or is it merely our fear of the unknown?

Einstein once stated that those who achieve the impossible are the people willing to attempt the absurd. This is the challenge of the new leader – to look at seemingly hopeless situations with new eyes, to see possibility where others see no hope, to bridge this chasm of impossibility so consciousness, wisdom and practice can come together to transcend the human condition to which most people are resigned.

Take wars for instance, or terrorism. Advocates of traditional approaches to resolving conflict have turned their backs on a more collaborative form of reconciling differences and are calling their counterparts “idealists” or accusing them of being unrealistic – actions not conducive to reconciliation. This smacks of resignation and cynicism, resulting in enforced domination at best. Yet most nations insist on taking this approach. Continuing to do things that have never provided the desired result, while expecting they will somehow miraculously work “this time,” is one definition of insanity.

In 1994 as South Africa was seeking to end apartheid they created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, heard from 20,000 people who were either perpetrators or victims of deep seated prejudice. The Commission succeeded in resolving generations of collective hatred and desire for vengeance. Riots and civil war were avoided. In spite of these positive results fourteen years ago, the rest of the world still insists on resorting to war to resolve grievances, reinforcing the old consciousness paradigm and causing more and more pain and suffering. This also leads to continued resentments which get repressed until they have a chance to explode into more violence later – sometimes decades later after the hate has been passed down to new generations. This is plain nuts when there's a model for a better way!

Leadership is needed to start thinking differently. In the case of South Africa, it was Tutu, Mandela and de Klerk who led the way. This new leadership is not necessarily going to come from elected or appointed people – “official” leaders. It will come from people who see what needs to happen and have the courage to take a stand for the required actions or remedies. They do not remain silent. These new leaders are not irresponsible anarchists or rabble rousers but a breed of more mature, long-term thinkers who have developed a level of consciousness closer to what Einstein was advocating. These new leaders are all around us, in all parts of the world. They are individuals, organizations, communities, even nations we don't normally think of as leaders or strong advocates of new ideas.

Our hope for a better world lies in these new leaders. They employ greater consciousness to create a better future. This is in contrast to remaining in the old consciousness which is resulting in greater disconnection, obsessive consumption, environmental degradation and cultural homogenization. Their thinking is based on assumptions that we are all connected, like leaves on the same tree, not separate entities competing for the same resources.

This new consciousness requires looking through a new lens toward the future. The old consciousness is based upon assumptions of zero-sum, for me to win you must lose. Another false assumption is we are separate and unrelated. Yet another has been that the earth's resources are never ending and, in addition, meant exclusively for humankind to use. These outmoded assumptions have contributed to obsessive and addictive behaviors on a mass scale, such as consumerism, over dependence on fossil fuels, growing gap between haves and have-nots and other negative byproducts of a consciousness that has outrun its usefulness. Another byproduct is the dominating, hierarchical model for leadership. Here are a few comparisons between conscious leadership and traditional leadership:

TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP	CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP
Politics prevails	Truth-telling prevails
Tends to lead forcefully	Leads with presence
Tends to be dominating	Possesses dominion, mastery
Protects own image	Serves those who follow
Intimidates, rules, manipulates	Inspires, evokes greatness
Relies on form, structure	Trusts in Self, other
Outer-directed	Inner-directed
Eventually becomes incompetent	Continues to grow and learn
More adolescent, even if highly-functional	Adult, wiser and more mature
Strong persona, maintains image	Authentic and genuine

Through conscious leadership we can transcend traditional means of resolving conflict in our world. We will be able to transcend perverse nationalism, elitism and fundamentalism. Through conscious leadership we can create a way of life that is sustainable so our descendants will inherit a world that is life-affirming and flourishing for everyone. With the help of these new leaders, greater numbers will come to recognize the interconnectedness of all life. What a wonderful future we humans have waiting for us if we can get past this impasse of separateness. We will stand a greater chance of fulfilling a destiny that goes beyond our current level of evolution.

This “better future” is not the fantasy of one person or one group. It is a future that affirms and respects all life. It allows for every human to have their basic needs met and have the opportunity to be happy. It assures our planet will continue to serve as a hospitable home, following democracy pioneer Thomas Paine's decree: «My country is the world. My countrymen are mankind¹.»

This better future will require organizations that reflect this new consciousness – a far cry from the more typically dysfunctional or bureaucratic organizations of today. These organizations will be places where workers are aligned with this new consciousness. After all, where does a conscious leader want to work? Certainly not in an organization that is committed to maintaining the status quo! “Conscious organizations” will attract workers, investors, vendors and customers who reflect this new consciousness – people who want to do business with other people who are awake and more conscious, sharing in the greater vision for a better world.

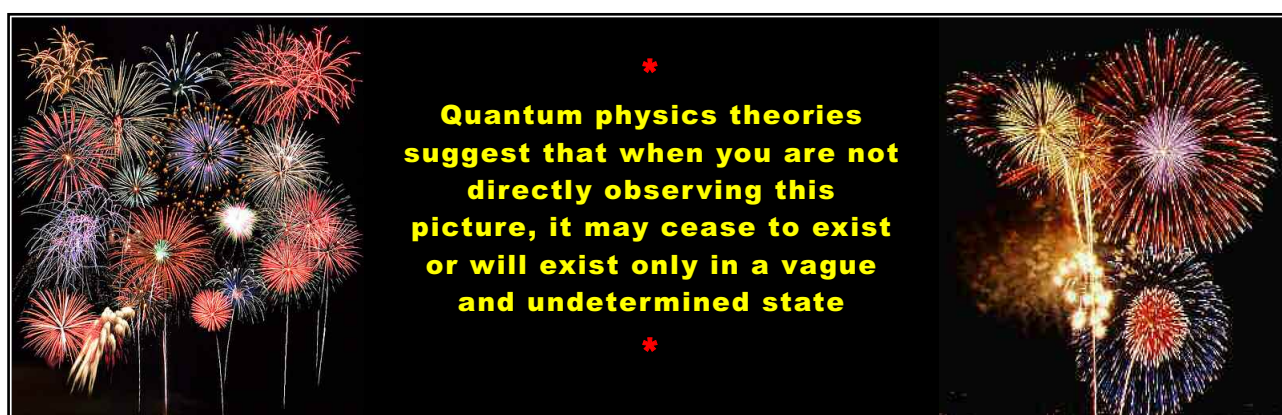
CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION

We have the opportunity to consciously participate in our evolution for the first time in history – to consciously evolve. Never before has a species possessed the ability to choose whether it continues to evolve toward a higher

But these conscious leaders, these more mature stand-takers will be opposing many of the present day trends and advocating new approaches. This may cause them to be branded ‘conservative’ by the liberals or ‘leftist’ by the Right Wing because they will not be wedded to a single ideology. Conscious leaders transcend left and right, conservative and liberal. They stand for a new way for us all to exist in a sustainable world *together*, focused on our commonalities not exaggerating our differences and warring with one another verbally or militaristically.

Many of these people are already speaking out and, as is often done when a paradigm change is in its beginnings, they are being shouted down. I know from personal experience over the past twenty-five years.

Some are quite young, some older, many from outside the circle of elitists or power-brokers. It takes sophisticated discernment to distinguish between the extremists who continue to drive a wedge between the warring ideologies



form or “devolve” and face possible extinction. Those who take a stand for this new truth – before it becomes more commonly held - will be the leaders who create the future we’d all prefer. This will be a future where the impact of human beings on the environment is net zero, where everyone on Earth has their basic needs met and everyone is free to pursue lives of their own choosing. This would mean a world that is environmentally sustainable, socially just and spiritually fulfilling for us all.

“Utopian,” you say? “Hogwash!” you decry?

Let me ask then: Is the state of present-day human evolution the ultimate destination for us? Is this it? Have we been put on this Earth to be busy consumers, scurrying about playing with our technologies so we may buy a bigger SUV or a new trinket or a faster computer? Is this humankind’s destiny?

If you think not, then what awaits us? Could Einstein have been right? Could we not have a different global culture if we chose to think with a new consciousness? If you think the present reality is the ultimate destiny for our species, then you are probably living life for all you can get from it. After all, if this is the End Game, why concern ourselves with making things better?

Talk of a more conscious evolution may not initially be popular because it means growing up. And we know how teenagers love being told they need to be more responsible!

and the radicals who are insisting on a way toward a future whereby all human beings continue to evolve and grow in a climate of dignity, respect and security.

WHERE WILL THE CONSCIOUS LEADERS COME FROM?

When paradigms change, the agents or catalysts for change rarely come from within the core of the system. The established leaders are usually so embroiled in the traditions, beliefs and priorities of the system they rarely see the need for change much less initiate it. As former US Ambassador to NATO Harlan Cleveland writes, “Those with visible responsibility for leadership are nearly always too visible to take responsibility for change².”

Much like the emperor with no clothes, the newcomers and the outsiders are the ones who can see the truth and dare to blow the whistle. These newcomers may be smaller countries, lesser-known personalities, individuals without rank or title - people who can see dysfunction and policies that border on the insane because they have distance and objectivity. They are not mired down in the system. They have not drunk the Kool-Aid of the established paradigm or system.

Conscious leaders possess a unique combination of strengths – a powerful and informed vision for a sustainable species as well as the spiritual chutzpah to act on their vision. In contrast to traditional leaders who spend



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years building resumes, acquiring wealth and power, playing politics to get the titles and rank, these new leaders know the way to a better future is incredibly simple once the shackles of convention are released.

No widespread training is needed. No large budgets are required. No expert consultants need be hired. And, it doesn't require years to implement. All we have to do is change our thinking. It can happen in minutes! Changing our mindsets can be done simply by letting go of beliefs and attitudes that no longer serve us. It can happen by shifting our point of view and creating a new context for the way we think. As these new leaders point out, it is simply a sane and sensible way of living together. Once the new mindset is in place, new structures and forms follow suit, not as band-aid fixes but as re-created solutions within the new context.

Social scientist Willis Harman wrote extensively about the craziness of acting as if we were *not* connected as human beings when all the evidence (from mystics and philosophers over the centuries and now even from modern science) shows us we are all connected. Acting like we are not connected to one another is like treating your leg or arm as if it belongs to someone else!

Some leaders of conscious evolution already exist in government, business, education and most other segments of our society. But their populations are small, relatively low-profile, and widely dispersed. They exist in all levels of organizational systems. Some are independent and work as consultants. They are showing up in more and more situations, and in greater and greater numbers, around the world. They are starting to make noise.

All these thoughts are mere academic rhetoric unless there is action to back it up. So, dear reader, what about you? Are you going to continue giving legitimacy to those systems and institutions you complain about? Or are you going to begin speaking out to people who can do something to change things?

Are you ready to embark on a practice of self-discovery, to examine your life and raise your own consciousness so you are sensitive to the pulse of humanity and the power and purity of a responsible global citizenry? Are you willing to be universally responsible?

What do you see that needs to be changed? What can you do about it? Now is the time to get into action. Now is the time to take responsibility to lead the way if you possess the consciousness, the awareness and the sensitivity to what wants to be changed. The only question remaining is when do you start?

¹ CLEVELAND, HARLAN (2002), *Nobody in Charge*, Yossey-Bass, San Francisco.

² PAINE, THOMAS (1856), *Rights of Man*, James Watson, London. ■