

Inspiring People to Their Greatness

Lance H. K. Secretan

Leaders have long been urged to concentrate on core competencies. The theory of core competencies is very logical: if we focus on what we do best, we will get better at it. The corollary is that corporations should stop doing those things that are recognized weaknesses. The intent of this of course is to guide organizations to higher performance, and corporate leaders have paid attention. The result has been a boom in the practice of subcontracting, outsourcing, and forging strategic alliances with others whose strengths complement our weaknesses.



But there is a paradox at work here. If it works so well with organizations and if we buy the core competency idea so completely, why don't we apply the same principle to people? If we invested more of our leadership capital in inspiring people in organizations to recog-

nize and build on the strengths of those they lead, the increased performance could be staggering.

When I used to run Manpower Limited, we had a franchisee called John Harold. To this day I have not met his equal as a marketer. He was absolutely brilliant. But if he was the Leonardo da Vinci of sales and marketing, he was the Rube Goldberg of administration—he couldn't submit a form to save his life, let alone complete it accurately. I would visit his operations in a trance about his sales and rhapsodize

about his commercial achievements, and then I would say something like, "John, I haven't had a sales summary from you for eighteen months. Would you please start sending them?" He would assure me he would, I would go home—and nothing different would happen. My visits started to take on a similar pattern: ecstasy over his sales,

despair about his forms. Once, after applauding another record-breaking sales performance that set a stratospheric standard for the rest of the company to follow, I gamely asked him if he would consider sending a monthly summary once a quarter. He agreed (but nothing different happened).

Be a Heartlifter

I was the CEO, and I was supposed to be the teacher and coach, but I began to realize it was John Harold who was giving the lessons. Finally, he reached me, and I got it—I needed to be a heartlifter. I went down to his office one day and I said, "John, whenever I visit you, I always compliment you on your brilliant sales performance and then I complain about your summaries. I am here to promise you that the last time I did this was the last time I will ever do so. I have hired someone on my payroll to complete your monthly summaries for you. I will never nag you again about your sales summaries. Now, how can I help you with your sales?" We never looked back.

Whatever gave me the idea that I could turn one of the finest marketers I had ever met in my entire life, into—at best—a mediocre form-filler? Why would I want to? Why was I so arrogant? Why would I try to reduce him to a corporate

multi-competenced clone? Here was a one-of-a-kind genius and I was about to squander his gifts and destroy his motivation.

Psychologist James Loehr has helped train, among others, tennis great Martina Navratilova. Loehr has studied what tennis players do when they take a 20-second break between points during a match. Loehr discovered that mediocre players use that time to react to the previous point—scolding themselves after a missed point, for example. In contrast, the best players, Loehr found, spend the time preparing for the

We need to know that the principle of focusing on core competencies is as sound for individuals as it is for organizations. This is a key for inspiring people to greatness.

Start in the Right Place

The greatest need humans have is to love and be loved. The second-greatest need is to inspire and be inspired. Yet we believe that we can achieve more by harping on people's weaknesses and "motivating" them than by playing to their strengths and inspiring them. The widespread lack of personal and

inspired and optimistic is one thing; trying to lead someone who is afraid and cynical is altogether different. Today's leader must be gifted with new insights and perspectives on how to discover the strengths in those they lead and build on those strengths. Leaders also need to be able to consciously identify the weaknesses in others and—if those others find time spent correcting their weaknesses uninspiring—then assigning the tasks to others for whom those weaknesses are strengths. We can't all play in every position—but there is always someone whose strength is another's weakness.

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next point, relaxing, energizing themselves, planning their strategy and tuning their minds. In other words, low achievers work on weaknesses and high achievers work on strengths.

Marcel Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery comes not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." We need to work on people's strengths instead of carping about their weaknesses. Then we can build on the core competencies of people, knowing that there are other ways to take care of the rest.

professional inspiration has its roots in the epidemic presence of fear. Fear has seeped into every crevice of our lives, distracting our attention from tasks and people and therefore reducing our mastery and effectiveness as humans. We are afraid of health risks, personal safety, retirement and financial security, job loss, institutions, government, radicalism, dying, racism, isolation, violence—and the list of fears is endless.

This presents the contemporary leader with a tremendous challenge, because leading someone who is

Discover People's Strengths

We find the strengths in others by going deep, asking the difficult and ultimately inspiring questions. The true role of the great leader is to ask such questions as these:

- What is your *Destiny*? (*Why are you here on Earth?*)
- What is your *Cause*? (*How will you be while you are here—what will you stand for?*)
- What is your *Calling*? (*What will you do and how will you use your talents and gifts to serve?*)

Stand in front of someone who has a deep, inner knowing of their purpose in life, someone who is very

clear about *Why* they are here on Earth, how they will *Be* while they are here, and what they have been sent here to *Do*. You aren't standing in front of someone who is talking about their weaknesses! Experience their energy. You are standing in front of an inspiring person. I call this combination the "why-be-do."

My personal Destiny is "To help create a more sustainable and loving planet." My Cause is "To inspire

others to honor the sacredness in all relationships." My Calling is "To lead and serve through my writing, teaching, and speaking." My Calling does not describe my weaknesses—it addresses my strengths—my gifts and talents, which I can use with passion to serve the world.

It's quite simple really—we guide others to greatness by inspiring them. And we can best inspire them by guiding their energy and passion

toward their strengths. This is where we can grow and excel. We can't do this by focusing on our weaknesses. (See the sidebar, "How We Discover Our Individual Strengths.")

We are more effective when we take personal responsibility for tapping into our fears and passions, getting clear about what makes us afraid (our weaknesses) and what inspires us (our strengths). This awareness can also inspire and allow for blocks

How We Discover Our Individual Strengths

Thirty years of leadership research (contained in my book, *Inspire! What Great Leaders Do*) shows that great leaders—past and present—did not rely on weak constructs like mission, vision, and values statements. They had a clear inner knowing about their strengths and how they were going to live them in the world. This is something we can do for ourselves too, and teach the people we lead. These are the seven questions that clarify the strengths to be lived:

1. What is my Destiny? Why am I here on Earth? How does my life make a difference? To what am I prepared to dedicate my life?

2. What is my Cause? How will I be while I am here? What will I stand for? How does my work make a difference? Will this be a magnet for passion?

3. What is my Calling? What will I do and how will I use my talents and passion to serve? What is your Calling and how can I help you to achieve greater mastery?

4. Are my Destiny, Cause, and Calling aligned? Is my Calling aligned with the Cause of our organization? Is it the same for you?

5. How can I serve you?

6. How can I guide your contribution of brilliance and help you to grow and become fulfilled?

7. Am I inspiring others in everything I say and do? Am I creating the conditions that will inspire me?

These seven questions may be the most powerful questions leaders can ask themselves. They are also the most powerful questions leaders can teach others—and then live with the answers—simply and elegantly.

to be released and connections to be made, which results in an increase in performance, service, and life-satisfaction.

Keep Listening—and Inspire Rather Than Motivate

We can motivate people—through fear and incentives—to correct their weaknesses. Or we can help people to become even greater where they

meet the targets or goals I set for you, this will help me to meet my own needs and goals.”

When we are motivated, our emotions and behavior are determined by external powers. When we are inspired, our emotions and behaviors are determined by powers from within. Where people may be motivated to achieve, avarice and self-indulgence are the ener-

When we peel away the outer theories and the models postulated by so many writers, theorists, and students of leadership, one thing remains at the essence of the practice of great leadership—inspiration. After all, leadership is something one lives; it is not something one does.

Concentrating on where the talents and passions of people intersect—the definition of a Calling—is how we bring out the music that lies inside them. As leaders, we must invest in being heartlifters, listening and creating opportunities for each person to shine. When we learn to identify the strengths of others and blow inspiration on the sparks of these strengths, they will become flames.

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already show strength—and thus inspire them. But we need to understand the difference.

Motivate is something we do *to* someone; inspiration is something that is the result of a soulful relationship. Anyone who has had the privilege of working with a great mentor knows and appreciates the difference. The mentor is not seeking personal gain but offering a gift, an act of love and service. Generosity of spirit and the gift of learning is what inspires—both the mentor and the protégé. On the other hand, motivation comes from a place of self-concern—“I want to change your behavior with a reward or incentive, so that, if you

gies that propel them. The energy that propels inspiration is love. Motivation is self-focused; inspiration is other-focused.

Many people have become adept at manipulating the personality—motivating others—but we still have much to learn about inspiring the souls of others. Few people can even bring themselves to speak this kind of language publicly, fearing that they may appear too warm and fuzzy. Inspiration has become “the elephant in the room”—we all yearn for it but we are afraid to name it. The difference in inspired organizations, teams, and families is palpable. Inspired people arouse the hearts of others and thus inspire the world.

Lance H. K. Secretan is an author, award-winning columnist, corporate mentor, and prominent keynote speaker. His latest book is “Inspire! What Great Leaders Do.” The former architect of Manpower Ltd., he has been ambassador to the United Nations Environment Program and chairman of the advisory board to the 1997 Special Olympics World Winter Games.

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