

Leading From Within

Many powerful people have discussed and described leadership. The hallmarks of leadership include creating a vision, establishing a direction, and demonstrating by example how to pursue the path. As I reflect on those I consider great leaders I think of people such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi. Certainly they were vocal, strong in presenting and pursuing their visions and voicing their passion, most definitely important aspects of leadership. However, they each learned leadership through the crucible of life which honed and prepared them for their mission. They first had to lead from within, so that their integrity shone forth and their personal power established. Without first mastering themselves, and demonstrating leadership of themselves, they would not have had the same power to shape nations.

Imagine spending over 20 years in a prison cell. The courage and the conviction required to abide the appalling conditions Mandela suffered enabled him to emerge as the statesman he is. Gandhi's did not invent his ideas on nonviolence on a whim but as a result of years of struggle, including imprisonment, and demonstrated conviction to his values. Martin Luther King grew up with a full understanding of oppression, and knew it was dangerous to seek change, but had a vision, a dream, and was willing to back it.



Nelson Mandela, the statesman

Author

[Stephen Harrison](#) BSc (Hons), PMP, FPMINZ, ACC

Abstract

This article promotes the idea that leadership requires mastery of self. We must confront ourselves, who we are, and make decisions that enable us to stand out with distinction. As we master ourselves we offer increasingly powerful reason for others to follow us. To get there we must overcome our weaknesses, fears, doubts and limiting beliefs that erode our clarity.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, inner critic, leadership, personal power, resilience, patterned behaviour, personal transformation, relationship With self, self-awareness, self-leadership, tribal influence, values

First Published

March 2003

Copyright

© [Harrison International Ltd](#), 2003. This document may be transmitted & reproduced in its entirety.

To achieve leadership greatness one must, I strongly believe, lead ourselves first and foremost through and out of our own darkness. All through our life we have built up layer upon layer of programming, training, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, addictions, emotional responses, social expectations etc. These cover up and detract from our clarity over our life purpose and the values that are core to us. We establish protective mechanisms that keep us safe, maintain security and levels of certainty, but which also rob us of the ability to align with and act in accordance with our core purpose. Cutting through the façades we have built around our soul so we can shine forth in the fullness of who we are is a powerful process and requires deep commitment to self, and personal leadership. Success in this endeavour provides the substance for and basis of our personal power. It enables us to manifest leadership to others because we have triumphed within ourselves.

Fundamentally it is pain and pleasure that motivates us to action. We avoid pain and seek pleasure, with pain taking precedence over pleasure. We grow up with experiences shaping our beliefs, attitudes, values and perceptions. We learn who we are and what behaviours are acceptable, and which are not, from our primary care givers. We associate pain with non-conformance, from failure to work within norms and social boundaries. We associate with groups (friends, colleagues, gangs etc) and learn of the rules for reward by these groups. Obedience to norms carries rewards. Breaking from the norms, being odd or different, carries penalty and pain. But a leader cannot work in the norm, as an average person, as part of the group. At some point they must assert themselves, separate from the group, and come into their own space.

Most people start learning this as teenagers, rebelling from parents and choosing another tribe to belong to. They move from one social group to another, establish different patterns and norms, and feel they are closer to being themselves. Later they discover it was their desire to belong that motivated them so they were still being managed by groups. Some never get over this, looking outside themselves to satisfy their need for acceptance and belonging rather than from within themselves.

When pursued further, the maturation process eventually leads us to question who we are, why we are here and what greater purpose we serve. ***The recognition of our individuality, our uniqueness, and the possibility that we have value enables us to seek within for our gifts.*** Discovering and being true to who we are becomes important. There is a shift from seeking love and acceptance from outside to a place where we provide that to ourselves, and become less bound to the whims of our “tribal” groups and roots. However there is also pain in this process.

Shifting our focus from outside to inside us requires us to meet and confront all our fears, insecurities, debilitating attitudes and behaviours, and find ways of putting them behind us. Some of us have powerful inner critics that berate us as our parents may have. We hear the piercing criticism from within with greater clarity than the scolding we may have experienced in younger days, which can stop us in our tracks. Whether it is the voice of our inner critic or the rigid walls of protection we have erected over the years, they stop us shining, and to truly emerge we must overcome them. ***If we stay bound to our insecurities we shun the opportunity to change and to transform ourselves from part of the pack to the leader we can be.*** If we seek to change ourselves through coercion and internal aggression and anger we have simply substituted the voices of our experience with our own tormentor. We emerge when we have found ourselves to be lovable, acceptable and perfect as

we are, and truly believe that. That is not saying we are perfect. Goodness, what is perfection and who can judge that? It is saying that we are entirely acceptable as we are, that we have our own uniqueness based on who we are and what we have experienced, and everything has brought us to this point in life, and all of this is perfect and right as is.

To lead others we must lead ourselves. We must be able and capable of dealing with adversity, the naysayer, and find ways through and out of those difficulties. ***Our ability to deal with and manage external adversity and opposition is much greater when we have mastered the opposition that comes from within us.*** Our ability to lead with clarity and conviction in public is greatest when we have already managed that within ourselves in isolation. Perhaps being in prison for 20+ years is something that could benefit everyone. Certainly it provides time to reflect, see ourselves more clearly and deal with our personal demons. However not all of us need to change whole nations. We have good we can accomplish by remaining engaged in the world, but the battle within is just as real. A growing number of people are learning the benefits of meditation, yoga etc for stress relief. Some find it painful because they slow down a little and start to see themselves more clearly, and find things they judge as unacceptable or wrong with them. If we wish to lead others effectively then we must have already learned to lead from within. We must have confronted ourselves and been victorious in engaging with and being comfortable in the presence of our own voices and messages from within. We must have learned about tolerating and working through the issues that surface from our past. We can be hampered by insecurity and doubt or develop a powerful love of ourselves, warts and all. None of us can become entirely free of these things, but we can develop comfort for and appreciation of the fog we create in our lives, and find ways of charting through them. For as we move through our own internal fog we develop the capacity to lead others through theirs.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 6 (Deciphering Your Internal State) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

Coaching can support you create the best outcome when working with areas covered by this article.

Follow these links for coaching information

- [Coaching Overview](#)
- [Individual \(Leadership/Executive\) Coaching](#)
- [Team Coaching](#)
- [Group Coaching](#)
- [Why Sponsor Coaching?](#)
- [Offer: Free Individual Coaching Session](#)
- [Stephen's Profile](#)

I have always found the following an inspiring statement:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do

the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson, "A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles"

The more we connect with ourselves, and manifest the greatness within, the greater our capacity to work through life, deal with issues, and exhibit personal power that will inspire others. If you wish to lead others, then first lead yourself.

Where are you in the process of developing personal power and governing yourself? What barriers have prevented you achieving the success you desire? What behaviours and attitudes diminish your ability to lead others and create change within your organisation? As you learn to lead from within you also gain greater understanding of the issues and barriers faced within organisations and how to work through them.