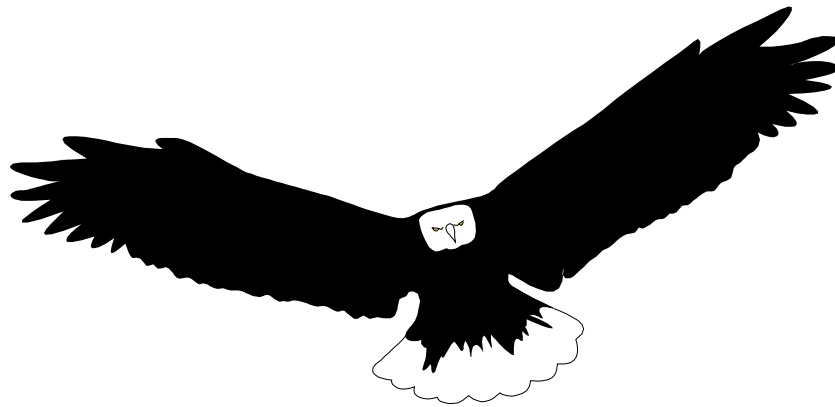# *The Awakening*
Personal Insights into Leadership

From the Archives

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This is the world of white water where we have to change to survive; where we have to develop to thrive; and, paradoxically, where the very act of change increases the risk that we won't survive.

Randall White, Philip Hodgson and Stuart Crainer
"The Future of Leadership: A White Water Revolution"

Preface

To move the world, we must first move ourselves.
Socrates

I first wrote this paper in 1999, midway through my Master's leadership program at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. It served as a reflection piece, in addition to an outlet to enable me to express what I was learning. Writing, for me, has always been an important medium for sharing my learning.

Now, 10 years later, I'm transitioning from a 28 year career in the public sector to a new career in leadership. One aspect of this transition that is very unique is that I have been on a steep learning curve for the past six months while I try to learn about social media technologies. It's been both a thrill and a frustrating experience. As the doctor on Star Trek used to say to Captain Kirk: "Damn it, Jim, I'm a doctor." Well, in my case I'm a researcher and writer, not a technical guru. We live and learn.

As I continue to move along my learning journey, I've come to realize even more the profound importance that self-awareness plays in one's personal growth. There are so many unknown unknowns out there that maintaining a sense of humility is vital to our ability to cope with a rapidly changing world.

Getting to know one-self plays an especially important role in leadership development. Without a strong understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, gifts and warts, it's very difficult to *really* grow as a leader. And by leader I'm not referring to leadership equals position. I'm referring to leadership regardless of position. A manager does not automatically become a leader when appointed to a position. Leadership must be *earned*. What is a leader then? A leader has followers. If you don't have *willing* followers, then you're not a leader.

I recall asking the participants at a series of emotional intelligence workshops I delivered some years ago the following question: "Who here has a strong understanding of their strengths?" Surprisingly, only about 10 percent of the participants raise their hands.

What this says to me is that most of us do not have a deep understanding of what makes us tick. While I have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator numerous times over 15 years, along with other similar instruments, and had feedback provided by superiors, mentors, peers and faculty, it's only in the past few years that I've developed a better appreciation of who I am. And in particular, where my true strengths lie and where I must pay careful attention.

One test of character, as Abraham Lincoln once said, is to give an individual power. Power, in itself, is not only good but indeed necessary for effective managerial leadership. The issue, therefore, is not the use of power but rather the *abuse* of power. It's all about how managers *share* power with their staff. Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts of America and

the current head of the Peter Drucker Foundation, has said that the more power you give away, the more you have. Think about this.

One of my more powerful revelations is the principle of *power with* as opposed to *power over* people. Or another way to put it is: managers need to do it *with* their staff, not *for* their staff or *to* their staff.

As we proceed down the path of trying to create organizations based on borderlessness, collaboration and shared leadership, we'll only succeed if we instill a climate of trust and openness. People need to be able to question the status quo without fear of reprisal from management. They need to be able express their ideas to their managers and have them heard and acted upon. They need to be able to take initiative to improve a process, product or service without asking for permission, and feel safe to do so. And they need to feel that they can trust their co-workers without having to worry about their backs.

It's a tall order. Changing course takes time. We must ask ourselves *why* are we going through all of this uncertainty, and sometimes pain? We need to make the connection to the client and the citizen. When people understand why collaboration, shared leadership and trust are key ingredients for an effective organization, they will be ready to make that leap of faith to a new way of working.

Power With…Not Power Over

Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Lord Acton

Jim Prince, a Tennessee businessman, succumbed to cancer in November 1998. As he fought the cancer over the course of many years, he came to realize that he "…had never done anything to benefit future generations." He eventually decided to leave 513 acres of prime hiking land to outdoor enthusiasts, keeping it out of the hands of land developers. Broke from his soaring medical bills, he mortgaged his house and borrowed the money to purchase the land.

After six months of lobbying with the support of outdoor associations, Prince persuaded the State of Tennessee to purchase the 513 acres and turn it into a recreational park. Soon after, he lost his voice to throat surgery, and not long after that Prince died. His spirit, however, lives on. He is quoted as once saying: "There's no limit to what you can do as long as you don't worry about who gets the credit." (As told by Russell Gerbman in *Backpacker*, June 1999).

This story speaks to the need for all of us to work in the spirit of what is best for our clients and for citizens. We need to put our personal differences aside and strive to work in a collaborative manner. Rather than protect our carved out space and take the credit for results, we need to learn to share the credit with others. This has an enormous impact on one's leadership.

Think about a situation where your manager gave the credit and glory to you and your co-workers (or co-managers). How did you feel? Think of a situation where your manager retained the praise and credit for himself or herself? How did you feel?

My Red Cross volunteer work in spring 1999 in support of the Kosovar refugees at CFB Gagetown in New Brunswick was a strong learning experience. What was very interesting at CFB Gagetown and other military bases where the refugees were housed was the sense of community that quickly developed. The refugee groups at each base formed informal councils where issues were discussed (e.g., language training, schooling for the children, cultural needs and recreation). Spokespeople were identified so that their concerns could be brought to the appropriate agency on the base. Despite what these people had gone through in Kosovo, they recognized the need to form a community in a strange land.

What I find so compelling about this is that it speaks to the concept of *power with*. Although the Kosovars on the military bases had certain rules to follow, they took the initiative to share power in order that they maintained some sense of dignity and control over their lives.

The same can be said for organizations. It's not just an issue for senior management to relinquish control and share power with employees. Employees must also demand it. They

must take that first step–that leap of faith–towards assuming more responsibility in the decision-making process. But with that increased power comes accountability.

The issue of sharing power and empowerment has an inherent dilemma. Managers talk of empowering their people yet cling to power. People want to play a greater part in making decisions and assuming more responsibility but they resist the accountability that accompanies this. Now these are generalizations, but they do speak to the opposing tension that is prevalent in the debate on empowerment.

In an interview on CBC radio in May 1999, well known Canadian management expert Henry Mintzberg made the following observation on what he calls capital 'M' management as opposed to small letter 'm' management. The former has made society unmanageable and poses "grave dangers," he asserted. Mintzberg continued:

"By small letter management, I simply mean the natural practice of leadership in very human, connected ways. That's not posing a threat…that's necessary. I think the thing that's posing a threat is the capital-letter Management, which is all the formality and technique and status and image and phoniness.…the whole approach to management that's based on people who are disconnected from what they manage, people coming in with these dramatic turnarounds.…It's a bit of Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution; we don't know where the hell it's leading, but everything has to be shaken up." (pp. 1-2)

During my residency in June 1999 at Royal Roads University, Dr. Alfred Taiaiake came to speak to us. He's the author of the book *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, and the Director of the Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria. Dr. Alfred spoke on the need for Native communities to take charge of their destinies. His strong convictions were evident, yet he spoke in a gentle way, mixing in humour. His book is a powerful and articulate commentary on the situation facing First Nations peoples. There are lessons we may learn as individuals from his comments. Here's an excerpt from his book:

"Leadership is exercised by persuading individuals to pool their self-power in the interest of the collective good. By contrast, in the European tradition power is surrendered to the representatives of the majority, whose decisions on what they think is the collective good are then imposed on all citizens.…The indigenous tradition is profoundly egalitarian; it does not put any substantial distance between leaders and other people, let alone allow for the exercise of coercive authority.…The lesson of the past is that indigenous people have less to fear by moving away from colonialism than by remaining bound by it; in their resistance, they demonstrate an inner strength greater than that of the nations that would dominate them." (pp. 23, 24, 27, 33)

What can we learn from Dr. Alfred's comments? How can we inspire staff so that *they* make the decision to empower themselves?

From Master to Servant Leader

Do the thing we fear, and the death of fear is certain.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

The expression *servant leadership* is often used capriciously, not only by people in organizations but also by those in the leadership literature. It is a very powerful yet deceptive expression, because it brings with it a required change in mindset and behavior on the part of the managerial leader.

Kenneth K. Greenleaf coined this expression many years ago in his writings. Prominent contemporary writers, such as Max DePree and Peter Block, have continued to advocate Greenleaf's vision (he died almost 20 years ago). DePree and Block understand what servant leadership entails and speak to it eloquently.

In his second book *Leadership Jazz*, DePree begins be recounting the emotional learning experience he went through with the birth of his granddaughter, Zoe. She was a premature baby, weighing one pound, seven ounces. Zoe was so tiny that DePree could slide his wedding ring up to her shoulder. Because DePree's daughter had been abandoned by Zoe's biological father, the neonatal nurse, Ruth, asked Depree to take on a special role. Whenever he visited Zoe, he was to rub her little body with the tip of his finger and tell her how much he loved her. It was important, Ruth told him, that Zoe be able to connect DePree's voice with his touch.

DePree concludes this opening chapter with the following observation: "Ruth was doing exactly the right thing on Zoe's behalf (and of course, on my behalf as well), and without realizing it she was giving me one of the best possible descriptions of the work of a leader. At the core of becoming a leader is the need always to connect one's voice and one's touch." (p. 3)

But how often do we see managerial leaders *not* connecting their voice with their touch? How often are people hurt in the process? Taiaiake Alfred talks about the traditional corporate model of management and leadership development. He states that training in these areas tends to be linked to the "…acquisition and exercise of power". He continues by noting that the result is a zero-sum power game, in which the manager is guided by four principles:

1. Jealously guard your reputation and status;
2. Constantly analyze resources and the opportunity structure;
3. Make others aware of their dependency on you;
4. Create a web of relationships to support your power. (p. 89)

Is this what we really want in our organization? There is an alternative. The following passage is om Block's book *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*. He speaks eloquently to the otion of *power with* and the new role of the leader as steward:

"The strength in the concept of leadership is that it connotes initiative and responsibility….It carries the baggage, however, of being inevitably associated with behaviors of control, direction, and knowing what is best for others. The act of leading cultural or organizational change by determining the desired future, defining the path to get there, and knowing what is best for others is incompatible with widely distributing ownership and responsibility in an organization….strong leadership does not have within itself the capability to create the fundamental changes our organizations require…Our search for strong leadership in others expresses a desire for others to assume the ownership and responsibility for our group, our organization, our society. The effect is to localize power, purpose, and privilege in the one we call the leader….

The alternative to leadership is stewardship…an entryway into exploring what fundamental change in our organizations would look like and what strategies are conducive to lasting change….Stewardship…questions the belief that accountability and control go hand in hand….when we caretake, we treat others, especially those in low power positions, as if they were not able to provide for themselves….We are reluctant to let go of the belief that if I am to care for something I must control it….If the issues of real power, control, and choice are not addressed and renegotiated, then our efforts to change organizations become an exercise in cosmetics." (pp. 13, 18, 27)

From my experiences as a former manager, project manager, relationship builder and community volunteer, I can now see where I was ineffective and where I was effective. When we attempt to maintain power through controlling the distribution of information or retaining the important decisions for our privileged gain, we actually lose power.

It comes down to the *right use* of power. When we abuse power, we weaken ourselves by creating walls around us and insulating ourselves from our followers. We need to ask ourselves the following question: Under what circumstances do I lose power? Is it when I am stressed, facing uncertainty or changes in the organization?

Knowing ourselves (strengths, weaknesses, gifts, and warts) goes a long way to helping us use and share power effectively.

John Gardner in *On Leadership* emphasizes that we must not confuse leadership with status. He refers to the top person in an organizations as sometimes being "…bureaucrat number 1." As he bluntly states: "We have all occasionally encountered top persons who couldn't lead a squad of seven-year-olds to the ice cream counter." (p. 2)

When leadership is confused with official authority, the result can be deadly for an organization. Gardner recounts a conversation on leadership that he had with a teenager. The youth responded: "I'll leave the leadership to you, Mr. Gardner. Give me some of that power and status." (p. 3)

In his book *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns talks about power and leadership. Leaders are a certain type of power holder, whether they hold a managerial position or not. He notes: "Leadership shares with power the central function of achieving purpose….To control *things*–tools, mineral resources, money, energy–is an act of power, not leadership, for things have no motives. Power wielders may treat people as things. Leaders may not. All leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders." (p. 18)

So what needs to be done by those in positions of authority and influence to ensure that they do not fall prey to abusing power? Daniel Sankowsky (*The Charismatic Leader: Understanding the Abuse of Power*) suggests that leaders must learn how to know themselves and to critically examine their behaviors. Self-reflection and self-evaluation are essential if leaders are to understand how they contribute positively and negatively to the performance of their employees.

Mintzberg offers a different perspective of managerial leadership:

"Leadership is fundamentally innate. We can enhance the ability of leaders, I think, but we can't take just anybody and make them into leaders. Leadership should be selected essentially by followers….when you see lists of what it takes to be a good leader, Superman's abilities are modest by comparison. We list everything imaginable….I think really good leaders are tremendously candid…they're very honest and open….

"People who are insecure play everything close to the hilt, use knowledge as a basis of power….Organizations exist for their products and services supplied to their customers…They don't exist for their managers. We live in a cult of management in which the organization exists for the managers….It's a pecking order of who's got power and who sits in what relationship to the chief executive. It's all very silly, really." (pp. 9-11)

Leadership is hard work. It requires a long-term commitment, the will to understand oneself and to change one's behavior, and the willingness to share power (if one is a manager). Leadership is not position; it is *who* you are. The efforts in many organizations to develop leadership development programs have overshadowed the true intent of leadership. Why are organizations spending so much time on leadership development, yet delivering such poor results? Is it because they are trying to mask their desire to keep the status quo intact? Leadership is hard work, but it need not be made into a complicated, mechanistic process.

Sister Elizabeth Davis, the CEO of the healthcare corporation in St. John's Newfoundland, spoke to the Masters students at Royal Roads in June 1999. Sister Elizabeth made several key observations on leadership, which may be taken as lessons. "Making our own path is what leadership is about." We become leaders because there is "…something significant left to do." This connects to our personal vision. She noted that the minute you name your values, you will be held accountable for them by employees and by clients.

She detests the word empowerment, which to her means "I'll give you as much power as I deem appropriate." Therefore, she refuses to use this word. She advocates, instead, "participatory leadership."

Sister Elizabeth's last thoughts bring together what it is we are engaging in and what lies ahead. She stated: "If you don't believe that as a leader you'll pay a price, then you're in the wrong place." Each leader, whether manager or staff, must have the conviction that the organization is better off with his or her presence. We need to feel this, even though we have bad days. We should see ourselves as gifts to our organizations.

Her last words summed it up beautifully: "Our work as leaders is not to change the winds. Our work is to know the winds and to know and set the direction."

Where Does Our Leadership Journey Begin?

When we engage in meaningful conversations
as an organization, everything changes.
Margaret Wheatley

At the outset of this paper, I spoke about the need for leaders (managers and non-managers) to know themselves and to understand the need for collaboration and shared leadership. This is a tall order, when one considers the heavy workloads that people carry. And for managers, it becomes an especially onerous task. "When do I have time to become a leader?"

Leadership is indeed hard work. Changing our mindsets and behaviors takes time and a sustained commitment. Robert Quinn in *Deep Change* notes that one of the hardest things to understand during organizational change is our relationships with others. We expect that it is others who must change. We're fine ourselves. "Culture change starts with personal change. We become change agents by first altering our own maps. Ultimately, the process returns us to the 'power of one' and the requirements of aligning and empowering oneself before successfully changing the organization." (p. 103)

We talk about seeking meaning in our work, but meaning is not extracted from books and videos on learning and leadership. It comes from within ourselves, and is reinforced through our interactions with others. As Patricia Cranton explains: "We interpret our experiences and the things we encounter in our own way; what we make of the world in a result of our perceptions of our experiences." (p. 26)

Mintzberg believes that organizations have a soul. He sees it as a spirit, something that is outside of an organization's structure and systems. "When you go into an organization that is *really* functioning well, you can feel it. Anybody can feel it. You walk into a place, and you say, there's an enthusiasm here, there's an energy here. People like to work in this place, people believe in the place. I think 'soul' is the perfect word." (p. 31)

Organizations are complex organisms, composed of people with diverse experiences, needs, wants, expectations and perceptions. In an address to the Masters students at Royal Roads University in July 1999, Margaret Wheatley spoke about the importance of relationships and the need for people to come back together in organizations. Unless we take the time to reflect, we will continue to go faster and faster, and introduce fad after fad. The management literature is exploding and people are searching for the answers to complex problems. We are digging ourselves deeper and deeper into a hole. The least we can do is stop digging.

Our journey as leaders begins with discovering who we really are. By developing self-confidence through enhancing our self-awareness, we in turn establish ourselves as leaders. But one key question that we must always be prepared to ask ourselves is this: "Am I the right person to be

leading at this moment?" This means that we must also ask this question: "Am I serving my followers to the best of my abilities?"

By followers, do not confuse this with those under your authority. You can be a leader of your peers or even your superiors. What's important is that we understand our role at any point in time and the impact this has on leading others.

The word *complacency* is not in the vocabulary of leaders. As leaders, we must continually challenge ourselves and those we lead. However, we must first undertake our own personal search to discover ourselves.
Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* state:

"You can't elevate others to higher purposes until you've first elevated yourself….You can't lead others until you've first led yourself through a struggle with opposing values….A leader with integrity has one self, at home and at work, with family and with colleagues. Such a leader has a unifying set of values that guide choices of action regardless of the situation….To step out into the unknown, begin with the exploration of the inner territory. With that as a base, we can then discover and unleash the leader within all of us." (p. 339-340)

Sister Elizabeth reminded us during her presentation of the huge changes that we have all been experiencing. It's because of the turmoil that has hit organizations and society that leaders today no longer have the maps that past leaders had. Those maps that exist and sometimes used are now out of date. She added the admonition: "The real change has yet to begin." Leaders must prepare the environment to deal with the onslaught of change. And what we need to remember is that the world in which we live is a world of the unknown.

This poses a tremendous challenge to leaders, whether they work in business, government, or the volunteer sector. To create the type of organization and public service that has been envisioned and espoused by senior government leaders requires a leap of faith. Managers and staff throughout the public service need to understand *why* shared leadership, borderlessness and effective managerial leadership are in their best interest. We need to see the link between these concepts and service to clients and citizens. **JT**

About the author

Jim Taggart has worked for the federal government for 28 years, during which time his career has spanned labour market analysis, innovation policy and competitiveness, knowledge management and leadership development. He has been a student of leadership for over 15 years, and devoted over a decade to applied work in leadership development, organizational learning and team building.

As a thought leader Jim has participated in, including initiating and leading, many change management projects that dealt with downsizing, restructuring and departmental mergers. His work as Regional Economist involved leading a team responsible for labour market forecasting and the creation of knowledge products on occupational trends.

In addition to a B.A. and an M.A. (honours) in economics from the University of New Brunswick, he holds an M.A. (honours) in leadership and organizational learning from Royal Roads University. His Master's thesis was on the topic of shared leadership and entitled *A Leap of Faith*. Jim's passion for continuous learning and sharing with others extends to his belief that leadership resides at all levels of organizations and communities.

His blog http://ChangingWinds.wordpress.com examines leadership and political issues, and his website http://www.LeadershipWorldConnect.com is recognized as a source of comprehensive information on leadership and team learning.

Jim is an active member of Toastmasters International and currently the president of his club. In his spare time he plays the piano and writes jazz piano music. He also enjoys reading books on business economics, political leadership and geo-politics, and an occasional espionage thriller. An avid mountain biker, he enjoys going for walks in the woods with his Labrador Retriever, Max. Jim and his wife, Sue, have four adult children (three daughters and one son) and two granddaughters. They live in Ottawa, Canada.

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It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.

Alan Cohen

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Brothers and Sisters;

*These words are now a prayer of hope for a new
path to wisdom and power.*

*Anguished hearts, minds, and bodies
are the profound reality of the world.
We have lost our way
and the voices of our ancestors go unheeded.*

This is our ordeal.

*There are those who remember
what has had meaning since time began
but we are not deaf to their wisdom.*

*Why do we not hear them?
Suffering; the dragons of discord.*

*Wipe the tears from your eyes.
Open your ears to the truth.
Prepare to speak in the voice of your ancestors.*

*This is a discourse of condolence.
A prayer of hope for a new path.*

     Alfred Taiaiake
Peace, Power, Righteousness