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Inspire: Guiding the Contribution of Brilliance

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Academy Fellow Lance H.K. Secretan this Friday today is releasing his 13th book, “Inspire: What Great Leaders Do” through his publisher, John Wiley & Sons. He has kindly permitted us to excerpt a portion. Following is a section of chapter 12 entitled, “Step 6: Guiding the Contribution of Brilliance.” Even this small portion showcases the usefulness, power, and heterodoxy of Lance’s ideas. Since retiring at age 40, (by which time he had increased the size of Manpower Inc. by 30-fold), he has synthesized valuable concepts and practices from many cultures into a powerful program that produces superb organizational business results as it transforms individuals from the inside out.

His plenary speech at the Academy’s Global MindChange Forum nearly stole the show. He illuminated the difference between “motivation” and “inspiration,” as a means of getting the best from people. He intimated the existence of technique for determining one’s Destiny, Cause, and Calling, whose identification, he asserts, is the secret to individual fulfillment and making a difference in the world. Indeed the book describes the identification process in some detail.

In addition to identifying Destiny, Case, and Calling, “Inspire” shows its readers how to align them, to apply them in the context of servant-leadership, to get the best from others (below), and to create an environment where others can replicate this process.

You can learn more about the book, using a variety of media from sound to PDA, and purchase it by visiting <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0471648825.html>

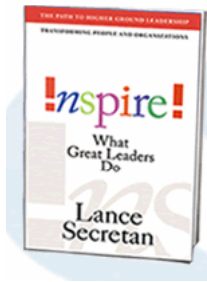
Guiding the Contribution of Brilliance

The glory of friendship is not in the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is in the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him.

■ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thirty years ago, Frederick Herzberg was one of the most popular business writers and organizational theorists of his day. A psychologist who believed poor mental health posed the greatest of all threats to Americans, Herzberg developed a keen interest in corporate life and

studied the reasons why so many people were unhappy at work, and the reasons why so few others were happy.



One of his most important contributions was what he called the “Motivation-Hygiene Theory,” in which he postulated the notion that people are motivated by certain factors (which he called “motivational factors”) while the *absence* of other factors resulted in employment demotivation. Flying directly in the face of the prevailing wisdom of the time, he reasoned that salary, status, and security did not motivate people, and thus these factors were not motivators, *but their absence nearly always proved to be demotivational*, leading to poor mental hygiene. Thus, he called these “hygiene factors,” and among them he included company policies and administration, supervision, working conditions, and interpersonal relations with colleagues and leaders. None of these, Herzberg argued, could be used effectively to motivate people, but their absence or inappropriateness was nearly always demotivational for employees. The leader’s task, he believed, was to ensure that all hygiene factors were at least neutral in relation to those being led.

On the other hand, Herzberg explained, employees tend to be motivated when presented with opportunities for achievement, when they are recognized for their accomplishments, when they are interested in, and engaged by their work, when they feel stretched as a result of extra responsibilities or enlarged tasks, and when they are encouraged to grow and accept higher levels of responsibility. Thus, he called these “motivational factors.”

Herzberg argued that the role of the leader was to keep both of these balls – hygiene *and* motivational factors – in the air at all times.

Now let’s fast-forward the movie to our contemporary workplace. So much has changed, and so many of these assumptions seem less valid now. Yet we might be wise to rework Herzberg’s theories and bring them up to date for our times.

Today, we have a greater need than motivation – we want to be *inspired*. We are not looking to leaders to *motivate* us so much as we want them to lift our spirits. The real issue has become inspiration. The question for us all today has become, “Am I doing everything I can to inspire in every person with whom I interact – *all the time*?”

In a world where great contributors continue to be in short supply, our responsibility is to find the right colleagues to fill these roles and then inspire them so much that they wouldn’t even think about leaving the team, but instead, use their imagination to entice their friends to join them, thus filling out our team’s full complement and potential. This is one of the most important unique and distinguishing features of any inspired group – at work or at home.

The Myth of Strategic Leadership

Another myth about the great historic inspirers is that they were all great strategists. Some of them were, but many were not. More important than anything else, they found brilliant people and inspired them – they focused on guiding the contribution of brilliance from others. It was the brilliant people they attracted who developed and implemented the strategies necessary to achieve

the cause. The Higher Ground Leader¹ is therefore largely responsible for developing, nurturing, and building the *relationships* inside and outside their group that will move everyone close to the Cause, and followers are responsible for everything else. I am simplifying here to make my point – in reality, the distinctions cannot be this extreme – though it is accurate to say that the leader builds relationships that lead to the attainment of the Cause and others design and implement strategy. Each, of course, is involved in all aspects of both. As Viacom CEO Mel Karmazin puts it, “Viacom has 137,000 employees, and it’s usually, ‘Mel Karmazin did this or that.’ We get far more credit than we deserve when things go right, and too much blame when they don’t.”²

Inspiring People to Greatness

We have long been urged to “concentrate on core competencies.” Tom Peters and Bob Waterman told us that the successful organizations in search of excellence “stick to their knitting,” focusing on what they do best and outsourcing functions where they are weak.³ A succession of management gurus has put their own spin onto this notion, but it all comes down to a simple general theory of core competencies: if we focus on what we do best, we will get better at it, which leads to mastery. The corollary is that organizations should stop doing those things where there is a perceived weakness. The intent of this, of course, is to encourage corporate strategists to guide their 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 the weaknesses of their outsourcing customers.

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? Guiding followers to brilliance depends on our playing to their strengths, not their weaknesses – outsourcing, as it were, to them.

...by Working on their Strengths, Not Their Weaknesses

When I was the president of 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 super-klutz 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, rhapsodizing about his commercial achievements, and then I would say something like, “John, I haven’t had a monthly sales summary report from you in eighteen months. Would you please start sending them?” He would assure me he would, then I would go home – and nothing 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

¹ “Higher Ground” is the core of Lance’s management philosophy. He defines it as “a breakthrough leadership practice based on the proven behaviors of these great leaders, that questions, deepens, and enriches conventional leadership thinking (which I call “the old story”) with wisdom based on ancient teachings that have been adapted to our times (which I call “the New Story”). The New Story of leadership is Higher Ground Leadership – a way of being and learning that is rooted in two fundamental, if now new, ideas: *we should love each other and tell the truth.*”

² Marc Gunther, “The Kid Stays in the Picture,” *Fortune*, April 14, 2003, p. 134.

³ Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run companies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

would consider sending me a monthly summary once a quarter. He agreed (but nothing happened!).

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 need 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 sales 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 the monthly summaries. I will never nag you again about your sales summaries. Now, how can I help you with your sales? How can I serve you?” 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? And why would I want to? Why was I so arrogant? Why would I try to reduce him to a multi-competenced clone? Here was a certified, one-of-a-kind genius, and I was about to squander his gifts and extinguish the flames of his inspiration. We cannot guide the brilliance of others by getting everyone to do something the same way; we guide the brilliance from others by honoring their gifts, and making it as easy as possible for them to be brilliant at what they do. Dilberts are intimidated into doing everything the same way and thus perform in the margins; Einsteins do everything in a way that plays to their strengths, and thus perform brilliantly. Sameness and conformity are easier to manage, but their price is mediocrity and demotivation. On the other hand, even though guiding brilliance sometimes feels like putting socks on an octopus, it is a gift to the soul – inspiration.

Marcel Proust said, “The real voyage of discovery comes not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” If we wish to inspire others, we will need to work on their strengths instead of complaining about their weaknesses. We need to know that the principle of focusing on our core competencies – working on building each other’s strengths rather than picking at each other’s weaknesses – is as sound for individuals as it is for organizations. This is a key to illuminating people, nourishing their souls, and inspiring them to greatness.

Brilliance and the Balance Point

The two Chinese characters that make up the word “busy” are the symbols for “heart” and “death.” In guiding the brilliance of others, we need to restore some semblance of balance to their lives. As the pace of home and work life spins faster and faster, we will not be able to expect consistency of brilliance from harried followers. It is unfair and illogical. The Higher Ground Leader works hard to remove, rather than add, clutter to people’s lives.

Powered by indefatigable confidence, humans have spent centuries attempting to roll back the natural world, to disturb the natural balance-point. We have striven to tame nature, often successfully, in a million different ways. But the laws of nature are immutable and will only yield temporarily to humans. Everything seeks to find its balance-point, and in the end, everything does.

Where I live, the stone walls of farms built a hundred years ago are barely visible beneath the tangles of rambles and accumulating earth. An abandoned hydroelectric dam that once powered mills, hotels, and homes has now fallen into disrepair as the river restores the site to its original state with humbling inevitableness. We used to be a thriving community with a railroad station and three hotels. Now we are a quiet hamlet of less than a hundred people.

These changes we impose on nature are illusory, because the underlying laws remain active and in force, even when they are not apparent. In the end, the Natural Laws always prevail. Meanwhile, if we challenge them, the energy of those laws will oppose us. The overarching principle behind the Laws of Nature is the need to seek a balance-point – for every action there is a corresponding and opposing action. This yin and yang of nature is the Law of Life.

These same Natural Laws apply in our own lives and especially in our relationships. Negative energy (emotions, ideas, actions, and communications) attracts similar energy. If we seek paths that attempt to disturb the balance in our lives, the immutable Laws of Nature work to return our lives to their original balance-points. The rate of pain, suffering, and stress we experience will tend to be matched by the degree to which we stray from this balance-point. Though the matching energy may not always occur in the same timeframe, it will eventually return to the balance-point. This is as inevitable as the erosion of the stone walls of the farm or the river's will to submerge the abandoned hydroelectric dam.

Just as surely, acts of loving-kindness and inspiration will attract similar forces. Where there can be imbalances between negative and positive energy, the balance-point is a place of perfect energy. The natural Laws of the universe are loving laws. Introducing negative energy that disturbs this balance-point attracts a correcting, negative force. On the other hand, positive energy – that is energy that respects the balance-point – merely reinforces the equilibrium of the Natural Laws and needs no correcting energy field.

The secret to achieving the balance point in our lives – essential for inspiration and therefore brilliant achievement – is to respect the Natural Laws of the universe. If we complain about the lack of balance in our lives while creating the very negative energy that creates the imbalance, we should not be surprised. We can't have it both ways; the Natural Laws will not allow it.

When we push against balance-points of life – by acquiring too much, by using more than our share of resources, by seeking to dominate or control markets, customers, employees, family and friends, by destroying competitors, by pushing people beyond their limits, by demanding performance of which people are not capable – we set up an inevitable cycle of reciprocal negative energy – what is sometimes referred to as “push-back.”

In a commencement address at Georgia Tech several years ago, Brian Dyson, then CEO of Coca-Cola Enterprises, spoke of the relationship between work and one's other commitments: “Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them – work, family, health, friends and spirit – and you're keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls – family, health, friends and spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.

⁴ Ursula K. LeGuin, *Lao-Tzu, Tao te Ching, A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way*, Boston, Shambala, 1997

The Balance of Ying and Yang

*Everybody on earth
knowing
Note and voice
That beauty is beautiful
Makes ugliness*

*Everybody knowing
That goodness is good
Makes wickedness.*

*For being and nonbeing
Arise together;
Hard and easy
Complete each other;
Long and short
Shape each other
High and low
Depend on each other;*

*Make the music together;
Before and after
Follow each other.*

*That's why the wise soul
Does without doing,
Teaches without talking.*

*The things of this world
Exist, they are;
You can't refuse them.*

*To bear and not to own;
To act and not lay claim;
To do the work and let it
go:
For just letting it go
Is what makes it stay.*

Tao te Ching⁴

The exquisite rhythms of life are dependent on perfect balance – yin and yang, the warp and woof of life – light and dark, beautiful and ugly, loving and fearsome, accepting and judgmental, masculine and feminine. Life cannot exist and unfold without this balance.

Like everyone else, my intention is to live (that is, think, act, and communicate) with love, compassion, kindness, truth, and grace. On the other hand, like many others also, I sometimes find myself thinking, acting, or communicating from a place of anger, hostility, or judgment. I sense that I am growing here, but I still detect the presence of a trickster, the wily character of Native American folklore, lurking somewhere in my inner space. This trickster confounds my good intentions from time to time.

When we match the negative energy of those with whom we communicate, we give away our power to them. These are the moments when we are less than inspiring, when we may project or behave out of our shadow. The dynamics would be different if we reacted with balancing energy. Thus we need both, even though yang energy may frustrate or disappoint us from time to time. It helps to view yang energy as a great teacher, offering lessons about issues in our lives that we need to address. Buddha said that our enemies have been sent to us so that we can learn from them. When presented with yang energy we have choices – we can invite the trickster to dance, or ask the question, “What am I being asked to learn by this yang energy?”

Like most of us, my behavior falls into two types – *yang*: assertive, decisive, focused, and directed, and *yin*: loving, graceful, compassionate, kind, and truthful. A search of one's relationship patterns will reveal that when we generate yang energy, we cause others to generate

more of the same, and when we generate yin energy, we receive more of the same. Although we are all a combination of yin and yang energies, certain people tend to trigger more yang reactions and responses, while others gently coax more yin behavior from others.

When we are uninspiring to others, it is because these energies are not balanced. If we are presented with aggression – an overload of yang energy, it can trip dormant aggression hiding in our own shadow – a response of more yang energy, and the resulting combination can result in a spiraling of yang energy, which, left unchecked, can destroy a relationship. Such exchanges lack the balance of yin energy necessary to restore equilibrium in dialogue and relationships and thus to enable us to be easily inspiring by contributing positive energy rather than depleting it. Only by introducing the right balance of energy can we inspire each other again – and we guide the contribution of brilliance from others by inspiring them – heartlifting.

As we have discussed earlier, our conscious thought is influenced by our shadow, which is that unconscious part of us that contains our wishes, memories, fears, feelings, and ideas. Our shadow is too easily goaded into a yang response by people who address us with yang energy, and our yin energy is easily and willingly seduced when it is addressed by yin energy. It is as if visitors who show up at our door can choose either one of two pals with whom to dance – yin or yang. If the visitor asks for yang, watch out, because that’s who they will get; and if they ask for yin, a gentle soul will emerge as their partner. They both reside in the same house, and neither of them has any prior commitments on their dance card.

When we communicate, our role is to balance the energy we receive and to respond with the appropriate energy, or combination of energies, that the situation warrants. When we receive an excess of yang energy, we need to respond with an appropriate blend of yang and yin, bringing balance to the communication, thus making it whole, and creating a relationship infused with spirit. For some, the temptation to respond with more yang energy is powerful – the shadow behavior straining to show up as the trickster. But when we remember to balance the energy, it works like a charm!

Knowing this, we have another approach available to us: we can invite everyone with whom we interact to address our yin. Failure to do so risks offering a dance invitation to the trickster who lives within. This does not entitle us to hand over the responsibility for your communications and relationships to third parties. It simply means that you and I are always partners, seeking to achieve a spiritual connection, and in doing so, we must teach each other how to communicate effectively. The secret to building inspiring relationships and being a Higher Ground Leader in a yang world is to balance our energy from yang to yin whenever possible in our relationships and in our responses. By balancing this energy, we strengthen or dialogue and enrich our relationships. This leads to inspiration, and inspiration is the key to guiding the brilliant contribution that lies within everyone, ready, yet waiting to be released by the inspiring dialogue of the Higher Ground Leader.