



Thoughtful Leadership

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES:

Einstein and the Art of Mindful Cycling
Mindful Crafting
Mindful Pregnancy and Birth
Mindful Travelling
Mindfulness for Students
Mindfulness and Compassion
Mindfulness and the Art of Drawing
Mindfulness and the Art of Managing Anger
Mindfulness and the Big Questions
Mindfulness and the Journey of Bereavement
Mindfulness and the Natural World
Mindfulness at Work
Mindfulness for Black Dogs and Blue Days
Mindfulness for Unravelling Anxiety
Mindfulness in Knitting
Mindfulness in Music
Mindfulness in Sound
Mindfulness Universe
Moments of Mindfulness
The Art of Mindful Birdwatching
The Art of Mindful Gardening
The Art of Mindful Reading
The Joy of Mindful Writing
The Mindful Art of Wild Swimming
The Mindful Man
The Practise of Mindful Yoga



Thoughtful Leadership

A guide to leading with mind, body and soul

Fiona Buckland



Leaping Hare Press

First published in the UK and North America in 2021 by

Leaping Hare Press

An imprint of The Quarto Group

The Old Brewery, 6 Blundell Street, London N7 9BH, United Kingdom

T (0)20 7700 6700 F (0)20 7700 8066

www.QuartoKnows.com



Text © 2021 Fiona Buckland

Design and layout © 2021 Quarto Publishing plc

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright holder.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-7112-6171-6

This book was conceived, designed and produced by

Leaping Hare Press

58 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RA, United Kingdom

Publisher RICHARD GREEN

Commissioning Editor MONICA PERDONI

Project Editor JOE HALLSWORTH

Designer GINNY ZEAL

Illustrator MELVYN EVANS

Printed in China

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



CONTENTS

Introduction 7

CHAPTER ONE

Why Do You Want to Lead? 17

CHAPTER TWO

Leading Yourself 37

CHAPTER THREE

Leading with Self-awareness and Choice 69

CHAPTER FOUR

Leading with Awareness of Others 89

CHAPTER FIVE

Leading Culture 119

Bibliography 142

Index 143





INTRODUCTION

We need good leaders. The issues we face are too great and complex, the consequences of thoughtless leadership too serious for us, for future generations of all living beings, and for the planet. A thoughtful leader takes responsibility for their world, and brings forth their whole potential and the potential of others for the greater good. Leadership is about standing up, showing up and stepping up, whether you want to take leadership of your own life, hold or aspire to a leadership role in your organization or community, lead your own projects, lead through crisis, or seek to make political, social or cultural change. The world is calling. We need you.





LEADERSHIP AS A SEARCH FOR MEANING

We have a choice. We can choose to live our lives reacting to events, or we can choose how to respond, and can commit to living more meaningfully, making a difference for the good of the world.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I was told that when I died, Saint Peter would be waiting at the pearly gates with a book in which all my good and bad deeds on Earth would be recorded. If I was good, I might be granted entry to Heaven. If I was bad, the everlasting hellfire of damnation awaited. It was a useful way to persuade a small girl not to cheek her teachers. Although my belief in celestial gatekeepers has waned, I do know that one day will be my last, and as every day takes me closer to that point, certain questions become more urgent and important: ‘What difference have I made? Have I lived this one precious life allowing its currents and squalls to carry me? Or have I checked my ship is yar, my shipmates ready and willing, and my compass set right? Have I placed my hands on the wheel and steered my life for the benefit of the world, knowing that whatever the elements throw at me, I will never lose my North Star?’

Leadership is above all a quest for meaning. I have the privilege of working as a leadership coach and facilitator, which I define as helping people make a conscious impact in their lives and the world, for the benefit of both. I’ll tell you my



secret: I am a stealth soul worker. Potential clients may approach me asking for support to devise strategies, organize campaigns, give speeches, improve the performance of their teams, steer through crisis and change, have a better work/life balance or lower stress and anxiety, but, as we work together, it becomes clear that these are gateway issues. What they seek at a deeper level is meaning, and standing up to take leadership is their path to living more fully and meaningfully.

To do this well requires deep connection with yourself, others and the world – connection which, I believe, many of us have lost because we live in internal and external environments that seem set up to separate us from ourselves, others and the world through distraction, avoidance and fear. At the fundamental level, I help people connect with themselves. They connect to their hearts to find out who they are, what’s important to them, what they uniquely have to offer, and what they share with the rest of humanity. They connect to their souls, which reach for meaning and higher purpose in the knowledge that one day this life will be done, and all that will remain is the difference they made. Part of the leadership path is remembering, as much as learning. This book is aimed to show you some of the ways you can do this, and so become a good leader by becoming a thoughtful one, committed to lifelong self- and other-development, to release the potential in all of us for the sake of all living beings for generations going forward.



My Leadership Journey

The search for meaning and purpose through leadership is my own journey too. I didn't start out knowing that this would be how I made a difference in the world. For many years, I was an academic, obtaining degrees and awards, teaching and lecturing, and ending up as a Fulbright scholar with a doctorate in Performance Studies from New York University. I learned about the power of confidence, curiosity, listening and storytelling, as well as my responsibility towards those about whom this is written. But while I could read and even teach the most complicated theory, my own heart and the hearts of others remained an indecipherable text.

When I returned to the UK, I joined the then-new adventure of e-commerce. Corporate life excited me. We made decisions quickly, we were clear on what we were trying to do and why. It felt positively rock and roll to me, after the slower pace of academia. This was also where I had my first taste of managing teams, which – unprepared as I was – overwhelmed me with the challenge that was other people. Then I was poached by a large publisher, and I learned resilience, not just because of the demands of processes, accountability and targets, but also because when I was made redundant, I discovered how strong I was. When I subsequently became Managing Director of an independent publishing house, I brought with me a desire to develop and support my team, and to represent a mission to make cultural change.

I tell my clients, who may feel stuck, that their 'stuckness' is not a personal failing, or the opposite of growth. Stuckness is part of the process of growth, and of the quest for meaning. Sensing I wanted to make a change from publishing, but feeling lost, I saw a coach for the first time. With his help, I realigned around my values and purpose, rather than my skills and experience. It was transformational, and my next role was Head of Learning with a business focused on helping people develop emotional skills such as confidence, calm, resilience, entrepreneurial thinking and leadership. Despite loving the mission and work, I often sat in a mostly empty room crafting self-development classes, with loneliness rippling through me. When I had the opportunity to facilitate classes myself, my heart soared. I wanted to connect with people, to feel more directly that I was of service.

To do this well, I trained as a coach, and now work with individuals and groups, and facilitate workshops and leadership development programmes. My success since then has testified to the power of living my core values of love, growth and service. Each step of my journey has taught me something about my leadership story. I have thought a great deal about what success is, and this is it: to live with integrity, your inner life aligned with how you show up in the world. My drive is fueled, on one hand, from a satisfaction in seeing people make a difference in their own lives and in the world, and on the other, from a passionate belief that we need good leaders.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

You are on the hero's journey: from hearing the call to action that enticed you to pick this book up, to stepping over the threshold into the unknown, so you may return with gifts that will be of service to others. This is the leadership path, and you don't walk it once, you commit and re-commit to it every day.

I HAVE ORGANIZED THIS BOOK into five sections to reflect the path of leadership from internal to external work. Leadership is both being and doing. The first two chapters cover essential inner work: aligning with our authentic values and purpose, and managing our inner states. The third chapter explores how to authentically develop leadership range, so you have conscious choice how to show up in the world. Chapter four develops this outwards to your relationships with those you lead, and the final chapter expands into how we as leaders impact culture, and the future of leadership, looking at areas such as resilience, diversity, creativity, prospection and sustainability.

I stand on the shoulders of those who have come before me. I leave complex theory aside to focus on actionable ideas and practices, tested in the kitchen of coaching and facilitating leaders and leadership teams internationally. I look forward into the leadership we need, and have chosen practices that will continue to support thoughtful leadership.



I have seen how transformational change occurs over time when people integrate these practices into their everyday lives. In a short book, I can only cover so much, and my intention is to offer gateways you can walk through to find your own authentic way to deepen your learning and your leadership. A short bibliography is included at the end of the book.

Making Time for Leadership

The most important leadership practice is setting time aside for this work without interruptions. You need to make the time if you want to be a thoughtful leader. Carve time for self-reflection and to hone your leadership practices on a daily or weekly basis and hold boundaries. Be your own gatekeeper and recruit others to assist. Resist the temptation to cram in another email. Thoughtful, effective leadership isn't about getting everything done, but getting the right things done, and making time to nourish your own leadership isn't optional. Many leaders have coaches to help them do this. You may not have your own coach, but you do have this book, and inside it an invitation to practise the ideas and exercises within. You cannot be a good leader without working at it.

The Three Cs

I begin my workshops with three 'Cs' – compassion, courage and commitment – and I offer them to you to create the framework in which I encourage you to approach this work.



First, Compassion: we judge ourselves too harshly. We'll forget things, screw up and sometimes fail. That's part of the process, and learning how to be more compassionate towards ourselves and others is an essential leadership practice.

Second, Courage: we can judge ourselves from a place of scarcity – 'I am less than a good leader' – rather than credit ourselves with our courage for trying. As US president Theodore Roosevelt wrote:

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best, if he wins, knows the thrills of high achievement, and, if he fails, at least fails daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

We talk about 'hard' and 'soft' skills, but the so-called soft skills are incredibly hard because of the emotional work they demand of us, and that work is fundamentally the work of leadership.

Finally, Commitment: change won't come from reading the book, but from integrating many of these practices into your everyday life. You will find what works for you, so experiment, and don't give up. This is how you will develop as a thoughtful leader.



The Need for Thoughtful Leadership

You stand on a threshold now, and my aim for this book is that it helps you over it into the thoughtful leadership our times demand. We face local and global issues, for instance, inequality, climate change and healthcare crises. We need good leadership. The ones who make a positive difference are thoughtful leaders: leaders who speak with authenticity, empathy, compassion, clarity and wisdom; who are transparent and trustworthy; who do not see themselves as separate; and who appeal to our better natures, empowering us, even as they ask us to move out of our own comfort zone and change.

The mindset of thoughtful leadership is not confined to an elite few. It's a journey we all need to take. It holds the promise of a parallel process of self-development and co-creating a more sustainable world built on shared humanity, connection, awareness and responsibility.

We have to learn and adapt fast, and radically. Life demands our growth. We cannot stay children, imagining that someone else is coming to save us. Thoughtful leadership is the path of emotional maturity: of responsiveness, rather than reactivity, and of responsibility, rather than blame. You are not alone on the path. We have important and, in some ways, painful choices to make, for we cannot continue as we have been. Thank you for standing up.



CHAPTER ONE



WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAD?

You opened this book because you want to take leadership. Something stirs within your heart, and simultaneously calls to you from the world. What bridges them is your leadership path: a lifelong series of invitations to realize the potential in yourself and others, for the good of the world. My first invitation is to connect authentically with yourself. Let's begin.





THE FIRST QUESTION

A leader doesn't need to have all the answers. A leader explores questions: what, how, who, when, and above them all, why. When you live your why, you live the question of your purpose.

A CLIENT COMES TO ME for leadership coaching. They might already be an established leader, or someone taking their first steps, or they could want to develop more self-leadership. I ask this question first: 'Why do you want to lead?' Often, this evokes a slightly startled response: perhaps the client raises their eyes skyward and shifts in their seat, as if trying to wriggle free of something uncomfortable. It becomes clear they haven't given much thought to this question. They might talk fluently, if slightly automatically, about how important leadership is as a function of their life, business, organization, project or movement, but they don't seem to be clear why they want to lead. I open the question out:

- Why is it good that *you* lead?
- Why is it good for the people that you lead?
- Why is it good for your organization or community?
- Why is it good for the leaders who come after you?

If you can't answer these questions yet, don't judge yourself. If you have answers, remain open to discover more. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to a young writer who sought his advice:



'Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers [...] Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.'

We will revisit these questions at the end of this chapter, and I recommend you return to them on every step on your leadership path.

Authentic Leadership

Close your eyes and bring to mind someone you consider to be a great leader. What do you notice about them? Are they standing on a podium addressing a rapt crowd, or facing down a line of police? Chances are you measure your own leadership style against others. How do you feel about your leadership abilities compared with the charisma of Nelson Mandela, the moral power of Greta Thunberg, the vision of Steve Jobs, the gravity of Angela Merkel, the brainpower of Bill Gates, or the fearlessness of Malala Yousafzai?

We are bombarded with cultural messages about what leadership looks like, which generate conscious or unconscious pressure to adopt certain styles or skills – eloquence, for instance, or extroversion. Some doubt they have the right stuff to lead because they internalize such messages, and discount what they have to offer. Others try to wear an



inauthentic costume of what they think leadership looks like. But thoughtful leadership is about being yourself, the person you were always meant to be.

When any of us live out of alignment with our true selves, we catalyze suffering and blind spots. The impact zone of this can be great for leaders, because they cast a long and deep shadow. A leader needs integrity. Dissonance between who we are and how we lead, and between what we say and how we act, has an outsized effect on those around us. People disengage from a leader who cannot walk their talk. Leadership is conveyed both in our actions and our way of being. When you say that you are approachable and open, but avoid making eye contact, keep your door permanently closed, or talk over other people, then the thread of trust between you and others becomes brittle and shatters. You might not notice it breaking, yet wonder why projects don't run well, and people leave. Unfortunately, some leaders' is to blame more, and tolerate less. They become the bullies they might never have intended to be, and sadly, this coercive style is one of those unhelpful leadership templates our culture propagates, despite burgeoning evidence of its negative consequences and ineffectiveness over the long-term.

If you live an inauthentic life, you commit an act of violence upon yourself, and spread toxic stress deeply and widely. When you mindfully align with your whole self, you tap into your authentic power. You feel confident taking a



True & False Self

We all wear a public face. As we grew up, we learned to craft them to be successful socially and professionally. We show different sides of ourselves to lovers and work colleagues, for instance. Depending on the messages we received and understood as a child, many of us also learned not to show vulnerability. We have a very human tendency to want to protect our true selves to avoid feeling hurt, but the downside is that we miss deep connection with others. Over time, we might identify with the 'false self', and feel drained from maintaining a façade. The false self isn't bad – in fact it served you, as you learned to adapt successfully to your environment. Good self-leadership means being aware of both the false and the true self, and asks us to develop conscious ownership and mastery over them. A senior executive in a world-leading organization was asked in a public meeting what his biggest mistake was: 'Not coming out sooner', he replied, showing his authentic whole self, and demonstrating the humanity we all share, no matter what our job titles.

stand on something you believe in, even if you are alone. Start your leadership journey by putting away comparisons and costumes, and align with your values and purpose, so that you know in your heart and soul why you want to lead.



YOUR STORY

Your story holds the crucible from which your leadership purpose emerges. When you know your story, and communicate it, you mine the past to energize the present, and envision the future.

LEADERS DON'T APPEAR FROM NOWHERE. We all have a story, which contains the crucible of your desire to lead and the values by which you do so. The essence of leading with authenticity is knowing what you care about, and then doing your best to be true to your values and purpose. To walk this talk, I'm going to tell you a part of my own story.

I experienced my first face-on-the-floor panic attack when I was forty-two. In the previous years, relationships ended, my brother became critically ill, I suffered a severe depression, was made redundant, and left my home. Unconsciously, I reverted to my failsafe habits of work and taking care of everyone else to feel secure. But although I was pulling the old levers, the machinery wasn't responding. I had run out of road, and needed to find another way forward.

A good friend suggested therapy. The process couldn't promise to make me better, but it could make me different – if I chose to be. Yet I kept holding fast to a story of loss and abandonment through which I filtered my life experience. I couldn't conceive of any other possible story. The reason lay in an unconscious belief that was running my life. My mother



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

YOUR STORY



Writing by hand or drawing helps accelerate personal growth through revealing important insights that can be difficult to access. Set aside time to do this without interruption or distraction.

1 Create a timeline of your life, in whichever way suits you. Some people like to draw a simple timeline from birth to the present; others draw a map of a river running through a changing landscape.

2 Once you have done this, sit back and take a look. Identify moments where you had a call-to-action in the form of a choice you made – perhaps a job you took, a relationship you began or ended, or somewhere you chose to live. Your choice might have been made during a personal crisis such as experiencing an illness, loss or redundancy, or a national or local one, such as a health crisis, political upheaval or community issue.

3 Note down what you decided to do or how you chose to respond, and the strengths, strategies, resources, insights and values you drew upon. How are they expressed and realized in your leadership? In what ways does your experience influence your leadership style/goals?

died when I was two, and I had been adopted. Somewhere in my child's understanding, I created the belief that I had caused my mother's death. Out of loyalty to her, and fear of a dreadful reckoning, I had lived my life convinced that I would die at the same age as her. Now, as that milestone drew closer, the internal alarm bells were ringing.



My call-to-action was not to seize the sword and step out into the world. With quiet and tender heroism, I first had to learn to listen to myself with compassion. Although painful at times, the suffering of living a divided life, disconnected from my whole self, was greater. I discovered that by accepting myself more, I could connect with an authentic inner source of wisdom, clarity, courage and love. I needed to take another leap of faith to leave working for others, to work in service of others through coaching, facilitating and writing. How I chose to deal with a crisis in my life reveals a great deal about my core values of growth, love, courage and service. We become the leaders we need.

YOUR VALUES

In the demands of leadership, it's easy to get lost. Values are your personal GPS or compass – an internal navigation system by which you can align yourself. When we align with our values, we feel energized and motivated, and we attract people to us who recognize our integrity and shine with the same values. When we are not aligned with our values, we generate dissonance, disengagement and demotivation in ourselves and those around us.

MOST OF US LIVE OUR LIVES following the scripts of others, often those of our families, work and cultures. When we step over the threshold into thoughtful leadership,



we stay mindful of the influence of scripts that are not ours, and instead we write our own. Although not bad or wrong, when we steer our lives with extrinsic motivations often elevated by our culture, such as earning money and achieving status, we are more short-term focused, less creative and may end up with a sense of emptiness. A word to the would-be-worthy: there is no moral judgment around values; affluence, achievement and status are values, but we need to check they are intrinsic ones, rather than empty vessels we feel should motivate us. When we choose to follow intrinsic motivations – those authentic values that motivate us from within – we are energized over the long-term, are more innovative and thoughtful, and feel more fulfilled. The best leaders are energized by intrinsic, authentic values: the codes and principles by which we want to live our lives and in which we believe deeply. The world needs leaders who are clear what they stand for, and what that looks like in everyday life. To uncover our values and principles, the only guidebook we need is our lived experience.

Values form the DNA of your leadership style and effectiveness. A value is not an interest like nature, nor a goal like travel. Dig deeper and once you unearth what's important to you about nature or travel, you'll hit your personal seam of values. For me, nature connects me to wonder and transcendence; travel ignites my values of exploration, learning and courage. For another person, nature might be important



A Coaching Story: The Authentic Leader

I once coached a politician who worked in an environment that brimmed with people with different educational backgrounds and career journeys than her own. When they debated the finer points of policy, she felt she didn't know enough to stand next to or at times against them, and was afflicted by Imposter Syndrome. When I led her through an exercise to uncover her authentic values, she gained conscious awareness that she was at essence heart-led. She valued connection, justice and supporting and mentoring others, especially women in politics. She realized she needed to act from her own values, to be herself rather than worrying she wasn't enough in comparison to others. Her anxiety decreased, her sense of her own power increased, and so did her leadership effect.

because they value the achievement of climbing peaks, and travel because they treasure family. By becoming curious about those experiences in which we feel energized, we can start to listen to what our lives tell us about our values.

Once you have identified what your values are, then you can ask yourself these questions:

- How am I honouring my values?
- How am I dishonouring my values?



- How might I do or be something in a way that honours my values?
- What are other people's values?
- What are our shared values?

Aspired Values

On any journey there are dangers. There are many values to which we might *aspire* as leaders, but are not authentic to us. For instance, I might say I value self-discipline; however, if you offered me a life without it, I'd probably take it. It's not a core value, more a learned, culturally sanctioned behaviour that has been useful to me. But if I could never be compassionate or connect with others – values which are integral and dear to me – I would walk away without a second thought. Without the opportunity to live and work by my values, I would be deeply unhappy and ill-serving.

On your leadership path, your *values-in-action*, rather than aspired values, are the compass that keeps you aligned with your inner self. This is why the exercise to uncover your values-in-action, included in this chapter, is based on your experience, rather than a list of values to tick off. When you need to make a decision, find a choice aligned with your values. Even if you need to do so reluctantly, you can honour your values not just in *what* you do, but in *how* you do it.





MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

YOUR VALUES-IN-ACTION



This exercise uncovers your authentic values-in-action. You will need a pen and paper and some time for yourself.

1 Visualize your perfect day: a day when you feel really alive, when you are in your full power, living your fullest potential. Be specific. This might not be a time when you are lying on a beach, it could be a day of crisis or challenge, when you are stepping up and feeling a sense of achievement. Write it down.

2 Get interested in the detail of this image. Where are you? What are you doing? What can you see, hear, touch, taste and smell? What are you wearing? Are you alone or are you with another person, or more than one? What is important to you about that relationship? How do you feel?

3 Mine your visualization by asking what is important to you about it. For instance, is it because you are *making a difference* in some way? Are you feeling energized because you feel a strong *connection* to someone? Write down a list of the values you uncover. The examples given here are intended to help, but resist the urge to pick them without starting with your peak experience.

4 Cluster your list into three to five core or compound values; for instance, my core value of Growth includes Courage, Learning and Creativity. Put your list of core values where you can see them every day, for instance on your desk or a screensaver. You can also anchor them with an object or picture that reminds you of them.

5 Consciously tune up living your values by choosing one and honouring it for a day. For instance, for Appreciation, you could start a meeting by offering it to people. With practice, consciously living your values will become second nature.



YOUR PURPOSE

What is the point of self-reflection and self-knowledge for leaders? If it is only for ourselves, we risk self-obsession, but when we return to the world through connecting with our higher purpose, we can be of service to it.

IF VALUES ARE THE COMPASS for your authentic leadership path, then purpose is your North Star. Teacher and author Parker J. Parker tells a story of how, during long winters in Minnesota, farmers would tie a rope from the back door of their houses to the door of their barns, to which they held to prevent becoming lost. This rope is like your purpose. In the blizzard of leadership demands, you can easily lose your way, your sense of who you are and *why* you are doing what you are doing. Never let go of your rope. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that ‘he who has a *why* to live for, can bear almost any *how*.’ Knowing why you want to lead gives you a deep well of energy to draw upon when things go well – and when they don’t. Purpose is something bigger than you that works through you, but you can smooth its passage by being conscious and aligned with it.

We can clarify our values by listening to our lives. As a coach, I find the most useless questions are ‘What is your purpose?’ and ‘What do you want?’ They are too vague and overwhelming, and it is tempting to tackle them as you would



an intellectual puzzle, when brainpower won't get you very far. Our sense of purpose comes from a deeper place within us, and to reach it, we need to use different approaches. I include in this chapter two approaches I use with clients: shifting perspective and visualization.

Shifting Perspective

The quality of our leadership and our lives depends less upon the answers we have, and more upon the kinds of questions we ask. For instance, we have a tendency to see ourselves as vehicles for the purpose of our organization or projects, but we can shift perspective by asking, 'Why have I hired or created my organization, business, project, relationship or life? How is it going to help me live my life's purpose?'

You can also tease out purpose by bringing to mind something you do every day, then climb the ladder towards purpose by asking, 'Why is that good?' Don't stop at one round. Whatever your response, follow each answer with, '...and why is that good?'. I suggest at least four rounds. Then you will start to enter the realm of higher purpose.

When we create a higher purpose ladder, it gives meaning to the most mundane or gruelling of tasks. In a folktale, three stonemasons in the Middle Ages were hard at work, when a visitor asked them what they were doing. The first stonemason snapped, 'I am cutting this stone.' The second stonemason, though less stressed, sighed, 'I'm building a parapet.' The



third stonemason beamed, 'I am building a beautiful cathedral in which countless people will worship God for centuries.' Here is someone with a sense of purpose.

Contemplation of Death

We can also clarify purpose by shifting our perspective to the end of our lives. As humans, we are born into a particular set of circumstances, which generate anxiety and require compassion: we know we are going to die, we don't want it to happen, and we don't know when it's going to happen. When we contemplate our death, we can reduce our fear of it. How do you want to feel at the end of your life? How will you know you lived your life fully? At the end of your life, you won't say 'I am so glad I emptied my inbox'. You will likely want to have lived an authentic life, to have fulfilled your potential, to have maintained meaningful relationships, to have spoken your truth, to have been kinder to yourself and others, and to have given yourself permission to be happier.

Contemplation of death can bring up resistance and fear. If you feel uncomfortable, let yourself soften. Credit your courage, rather than curse your anxiety. Thoughtful leadership is most essentially a search for meaning in full knowledge of the preciousness of our lives, and this is why it is a human and noble enterprise. As Apple founder Steve Jobs said at a famous commencement speech he gave in 2005, 'Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the



trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.’ He died six years later.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

THE DIFFERENCE YOU MADE



Visualization is a well-researched and effective method to bypass the conscious mind, which will analyze and focus on obstacles, and connect with the unconscious, which holds deeper desires and wishes. As always, take some time for yourself to do this exercise without interruption.

1 Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.

2 Visualize yourself towards the end of your life as an old person. You are in a place where you feel comfortable and calm, perhaps in a garden or a favourite armchair. What do you see, hear, taste, touch and smell? Let gratitude fill you.

3 Imagine that in this place, people have gathered to honour you and your life. Either one-by-one, or in groups, they come to you and thank you for the difference you made in their lives and in the world. What are they thanking you for? Try not to overthink this. Note down what comes up as it will give you some pointers towards your life’s purpose.

4 Based on this, begin to craft a declaration of purpose in any way that makes sense for you. It may take some time, so don’t judge yourself if it doesn’t spring forth at once. Anchor this with an image, object or piece of music, or by writing down your purpose statement, and keeping it where you can see it.



YOUR VISION

As a leader, knowing your purpose is the first step on the path to putting it into action so that the world may benefit. The next step is to create and communicate a vision to give you and others a sense of direction and inspiration, grounded in reality, and energized by what is possible.

IHAVE A CARD ON MY DESK with an image of Green Tara, the Buddhist *bodhisattva* (an ideal of one who seeks Enlightenment) of compassionate action, sitting with one foot stepping forward. She reminds me to put my values into positive action in the world. What do you imagine is possible if you put your purpose into action? This is your vision. What we can imagine creates the reality of our world. Visioning asks us to imagine what doesn’t exist today. It offers an image of where we are headed, inspires us to keep going through obstacles, focuses us and gives meaning to what we do. Ask yourself this series of questions, and write your answers down:

- What do you long for – in/for your life?
- What do you long for – for your loved ones?
- What do you long for – for your project, team, organization, business, gathering or community?
- What do you long for – for your country?
- What do you long for – for the world?

When we create a vision, we lead ourselves. When we



communicate it, we lead others. Leaders inspire themselves and others not through technical language, but through their use of images, symbolic language, metaphors and analogies to connect emotionally. In one of the most famous speeches of the twentieth century, ‘I Have A Dream’, Martin Luther King used metaphor, imagery and contrast: ‘A state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.’ Subsequent generations are still inspired by his vision.

Strategy without purpose and vision is an empty vessel. Leadership is dynamic. It has a direction and a process: purpose leads to vision, which then leads to strategy. Purpose is ‘why’, vision ‘what’ and strategy ‘how’. Once you connect with purpose, you can start to create a vision of what this will look like in action, and develop your strategy to deliver it. Without purpose, your vision will not motivate you or inspire others, and your strategy will lack meaning and focus.

Questions Revisited

We live in a world our questions create – questions that help us see deeper, higher and further. Refer back to the questions I asked at the beginning of this chapter, on page 18.

What are you discovering? In this opening chapter, you have consciously connected with your authentic values and sense of purpose to use as compass and North Star on your path of thoughtful leadership. In the next chapter, we’ll



continue to hone this compass to notice your inner state at any moment and consciously choose how we want to be and what we want to do to realize our purpose and vision.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

FUTURE VISION



The technique of visualizing success as if it’s already happened is used by elite sportspeople as well as leaders as part of their preparation, and the evidence backs this practice up. Take some time away from your everyday routine to do this exercise, and take notes after doing it.

1 Visualize yourself at a point in the future when you have achieved something that matters to you.

- What are you standing on?
- What are you wearing on the rest of your body?
- Where are you?
- What are the objects around you? Pay attention to their design and function.
- Imagine someone is coming towards you. Why are they coming to you? • What are you doing together? What are you saying to them and they to you?
- What difference are you making?
- How do you feel?

2 Create or find something to remind you of your vision, for instance a picture, mood board, piece of music, gesture or object.

3 Ask this future self for advice. If you are going to make this vision real, what’s your first step?