Great Leaders Inspire Us All

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Leading by example beats using rewards or fears to bring out the best in people, Lance Secretan advises.

In the 1970s, Scotch and cocaine supplied Jerry Chamales' highest moments.

At the tender age of 27, Mr. Chamales was, he says, "at the bottom of the food chain, bent like a pretzel." In 1977, he realized this was not his life's destiny -- he was not living an authentic life nor was he inspiring others to live one.

Determined, he dried out and straightened up. He founded Omni Computer Products in Carson, Calif., now a $30-million (U.S.) producer of computer supplies.

One-third of his 270 employees are, like him, formerly workless or homeless drug addicts or alcoholics, whom he also assists with addiction counselling and mentorship programs.

An avid conservationist, Mr. Chamales donates a percentage of Omni's proceeds to the Save the Rhino foundation and the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya.

Mr. Chamales has proved to be not only a successful business leader but also a therapist, rehabilitation expert and conservationist. In short, his story illustrates the power of living and leading by inspiration.

Like Mr. Chamales, inspired leaders have clarity on three important aspects of their lives:

Destiny: They know why they are here on earth.

Cause: They know how they will be while they are here.

Calling: They know what they will do and how they will use their talents and gifts to serve others.

Why they are here; how they will be and what they will do: I call it the Why-Be-Do.

Leaders who have clarity about their Why-Be-Do are inspiring to others because they lead by example.

They know how to bring out the best in others and they have a gift for being inspired themselves.

This was true of the greatest leaders in history, including Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa.

Mahatma Gandhi's life was authentic; when asked to describe his mission, he said, simply and authentically, "My life is my message."

Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King didn't have a quality program or a strategic plan -- they didn't need one -- but they each had a vision so compelling that it became a magnet for the passion of others.

Here's the secret of great leaders: They bring out the best in their followers through inspiration, rather than motivation.

All too often we confuse inspiration and motivation. We hire motivational speakers at conferences to rev up the troops, who are encouraged to buy motivational posters, mugs, plaques, and T-shirts.

We are so absorbed with perfecting the techniques of motivation that we feel compelled to drive and be driven in everything. We want to be values-driven, customer-driven, market-driven, solutions-driven and even self-driven. Perhaps this is why so many people are driven to drink, driven insane or driven to distraction?

This is the language of fear. What would happen, instead, if the language were love?

And instead of being driven, we were being inspired?

Inspiration emanates from love. Inspiration is what we feel when we access the ineffable experience of the spirit inside us. It is a knowing that transcends any external motivation that causes us to be driven -- and thus drained.

We yearn to move from feeling tired to being inspired. We are better off being values-inspired and customer-inspired than values-driven or customer-driven.

Motivation is something we do to someone. Inspiration is what we do for someone.

Anyone who has had the privilege of working with a great mentor knows and appreciates the difference.

Mentors are not in it for themselves; they are in it for others. Their generosity of spirit and their gift of learning is what inspires both them and you.

Motivation comes from a place of fear, scarcity and self-concern. "I want to change your behaviour with a reward or incentive, so that, if you meet the targets or goals I set for you, I will meet my own needs and goals."

Inspiration, on the other hand, comes from a place of abundance, love and service, with no strings attached. "I love you and wish to serve and teach you and help you to grow." When we motivate, we serve ourselves first; when we inspire, we serve others first.

The "old story" leader, who acts through motivation, overworks the metaphor of war and sport. Without the lexicon of competition, the old story leader is lost.

Speaking to an audience of business leaders recently, I was surprised to find the entire Asian region management team dressed in black army fatigues, combat boots and berets, and "guarded" by staff dressed in fatigues and black balaclava helmets. The Mission Impossible theme blared from speakers, underscoring the challenge of repeating the prior year's growth of 70 per cent. I scanned the program. The lunch invitation read, "12:00: Eat lunch or be eaten."

But a call to arms is not an effective way to engage the hearts and souls of others. Try to picture the conductor of the Toronto Symphony getting up in the morning and ranting, "Let's destroy the Montreal Symphony!" Or a heart surgeon muttering, "This will fix the competition" as he replaces a patient's heart valve. This is the ego speaking -- testosterone leadership.

Now think of the "new story" leader, who leads by inspiration.

I've spent many years trying to define "leadership." It is an elusive concept but here is my current attempt at a definition: Leadership is a serving relationship with others that inspires their growth and makes the world a better place.

If we want to be inspiring to our followers, we must make a shift from the "old story" to the "new story" and make service to others a priority.

The servant-leader knows that others yearn to be heard and to be engaged -- not in debate, but in genuine dialogue, not mind to mind, but heart to heart-- in a dialogue that springs from a loving intent, and thus inspires.

Joseph Swedish is an example of the new story leader. The president and chief executive officer of Centura Health in Denver, says, "I find myself consistently asking the question, 'How can I serve you?' My life as an executive is focused on problem-solving, and so, shifting emphasis from me to you when you are dealing with a problem with someone, by asking, 'How can I serve you?' is very disarming. Often, a person with a problem is dealing from a state of frustration. There's friction; there's fear.

"So, when you turn the conversation by asking a person how you can serve them, it removes all of that baggage, and it gets to the root of the cause of the issue, and it puts the other person's needs ahead of yours."

The other person's needs may be work-related or they may involve a stressful personal situation that affects the employee's on-the-job performance.

Perhaps the employee might respond, "I recently remarried and my youngest daughter is making life very difficult for my new spouse. I would be so relieved if this situation could be resolved."

The new story leader's response to this employee might be to offer help with locating and paying for a professional to work with the employee to help heal the relationship. With this accomplished, an emotional and spiritual burden is lifted from the employee,

who can then shed the distraction of it and approach his or her work with renewed engagement and commitment, leading to greater effectiveness.

Our journey to becoming great leaders, who inspire effectiveness and the human spirit, is to live authentically each day with a clear sense of our higher purpose and a commitment to building soulful relationships with all those whom we serve. It is more about being an inspiring leader than it is about telling others to be inspiring.

As Albert Einstein said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

Lance Secretan is a corporate adviser, coach and public speaker, and the author of Inspire! What Great Leaders Do.-