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Connected inspiration: A new perspective for authentic leadership

By Daniel Epling, Krauthammer Group Managing Partner

The two words accurately describe a necessity which we feel is increasingly prevalent in today's leaders.

First of all, "Inspiration": *Spirit-in*. We are noticing, more and more that motivational management no longer suffices: the search for a "motive", often extrinsic to the person and broken down into objectives, or the enchanting speeches of the '80s where leaders challenged their auditors no longer create the expected dynamics. The race toward exact figure results may seem endless and will often lead teams to exhaustion. We find ourselves tortured like Sisyphus, bringing our rock up the hill every day and starting over indefinitely; we end up thinking "what's the point?"

Managers need to resort to deeper yet more subtle sources in order to breathe life back into their enterprises. Inspiring others is based on one's own inspiration; making people and business management a basis for that inspiration. The admired leader is no longer reminiscent of Attila charging with drawn sword to meet the objectives no matter what the costs. To remain sustainable, leaders are expected to be more like a source of energy rather than greedy predators sucking life out of those around them.

Secondly: "Connected". We see "Connected" as an indispensable corollary to inspiration; an increased capacity to link rather than fragment. Major innovations are often suggested by those who understand how to bridge various disciplines, building on specifics to rise toward a pluri- and transdisciplinary approach. Before they can perform these types of links, leaders must first be connected to themselves and be focused and centered. The philosopher Patrick Viveret used a negative twist to express a striking truth: Man is at war with the environment, others and... himself. Let's deal with the positive turn of this statement by examining how we can be connected to others, ourselves and the environment.

Managers fluctuating between super-performing and personal burn-outs

Our findings were based on two sources: statistical and general data, as well as empirical data based on the thousands of testimonials from participants we interact with every year.

The growing *malaise* in organizations is creating a notorious collective worry.

This year, a report to that effect was even submitted on March 12 to the French Labor Minister. We meet managers that fluctuate between super-performing in their professional lives and personal burn-outs, ready to join Woody Allen in his cry "Stop the world! I want to get off", as they attempt to escape the spiral of permanent urgency. When challenges and the pursuit of excellence become excessive, the traditional practical knowledge in general-management, time-management and leadership models is no longer sufficient. Behavioral training has to seek out a soul supplement; an aside capable of holding everything together. How can we provide access to more verticality and depth?

We have reinforced our tested trainings with a different outlook that we initially called *Life Design* and then *Life Style*. No matter what the name, the goal of this approach is to help managing executives pursue exemplary behavior in their own lives first. Building existential knowledge requires understanding the link between the way we think and the way we live, and practicing presence within ourselves and with others. A manager's authority is becoming more and more linked to his or her ability to not isolate person from performance. This

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approach guided us in creating a seminar based on experimentation called *Connected Inspiration*.

A three dimensional concept of sensation, sense of meaning and sense of direction

In terms of demand from enterprises, the keywords are becoming leader authenticity, emotional dimension, managerial courage, development of potential, paradoxical tensions, complexity. We're seeing a search for that *special something* that expands on the more classical dimensions of management and motivation.

In terms of supply, we're in the middle of a boom of much more diversified approaches. These include *mindful management*, *leadership trail* and *team resilience*. These programs seek new angles to deal with the leadership issue. They use either outdoor activities (exercises in nature), or metaphors ("musician manager", "manage through philosophy"). Their common thread is "learning through experience", a theme developed in the book by the same name written by Alain Kerjean.

In terms of general context, the literature shows a significant evolution. A few examples from experts on the subject: Peter Senge went from the "5th discipline" (based on the Learning Organization) to "Presence" (an approach focused on the leader as a being); Richard Barrett talks about "liberating the corporate soul"; Covey's 8th habit consists of "finding one's voice and one's way".

The need to make sense of the world is at the heart of this process. We have broken this need down to a three-dimensional concept: first, sensation (what I felt during experimentation); second, a sense of meaning (what resonates with my daily life as a leader); third, a sense of direction (what this motivates me to do and become). This approach takes into account a thought trend, which has become a major undercurrent, and combines many factors simultaneously: turning personal development and existential quests into an agent for changing the world, integrating the sensible which is more conducive to cooperation than competition and taking into account the environment and sustainable development.

Stability in one's behaviour is the key

What we are looking to provide is not a pleiad of tools, but rather a different outlook on the fundamental questions that a leader struggles with. This isn't simply the next trend in leadership models. Nothing is offered as an absolute truth; the participant gets to verify concepts. The program offers many major benefits, in addition to the notions of authenticity and inspiration mentioned in the title.

The first benefit is surely the newfound emotional stability in people and business management. Participants often express a "serenity" that they describe through lucid and calm actions. There is less emotional reacting to sudden desires or hidden fears and more focus on what action is right for the person. The program calls on leaders to perform a type of "strategic personal disengagement" with regard to their daily lives. This allows them to regain their calm. Our work on the exemplary leader* has shown that stability in one's behavior is key.

Serenity makes it easier to resort to our intuition. In today's complex world, the leader can no longer know everything. Issues have become subtle, hybrid and non-linear. The leader must quickly learn to live with a certain degree of "unknowns" and let solutions emerge rather than constantly be forcing matters. The challenge is to help leaders dissolve what is solid instead of giving them another set-in-stone solution.

Thus, serenity is a place of internal peace where leaders can pause to remember the access code to their intuition. It adds to managers' uniqueness, noticeable when they find their authenticity, when they express themselves on the way they experience situations and from their ability to recognize and reject something when it is not in line with who they are. This is the "price" to pay for uniqueness and allows them to attract other unique individuals into their teams in order to develop singularity within their organization. This is the "price" of adding value to organizations.

Learn to let go of the idea *what should be* and accept *what is*

When building up this new approach, we met with many different players in the industry to reflect on the conditions that need to be created to promote a transformation from the inside; to help participants grasp the

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invisible while using an approach that remains simple, accessible and applicable to the business world.

We examined the ideas in the research of Yves Richez on “the emergence of potential” and his investigations in Quebec with Gaston Pinault and realized the importance of setting up experiences unifying the auto (me), the alter (others) and the eco (environment, from the Greek *oikos*, house). We then created workshops, with the help of Michel de Kemmeter, that are based on different “instruments” such as trees, horses or even golf. Moreover, we are preparing a longer curriculum in order to really create a profound process. This will include more cognitive workshops focused on, for example, understanding one’s excellence strategy.

In these programs, participants are encouraged to formulate a question that reflects a personal preoccupation that they consider important and existential in nature. The word “question” is made up of the word “quest”. Participants hence become *homo viators*, discovering themselves within and through the journey. Each of these workshops is a stop on the road. We help participants to let go of their idea of what should be or what should occur and simply accept what is, as it is. The quality of their presence is more important than the result. Basically, all the value of this learning lies in the quality of briefings and exchanges; experimentation needs to be reflected upon to be processed. Participants go from *learning by doing* to *learning by being*, from the *to-do list* to *be-time*.

Existential knowledge is not word-based

It is difficult to summarize the effect on each participant in just a few sentences. The general consensus however is a more qualitative relationship with time, an increased awareness of one's breathing or of the need for private time and even for taking good care of one's self.

Many testimonials describe an increased operational capacity to resolve contradictions calmly without being too simplistic; participants no longer act out of confusion or in an offset manner.

Emotions are felt rather than verbalized. How do you put words on an increased awareness which also has a powerful symbolic aspect to it?

***Daniel Epling – Laurent Magnien:** “What type of Manager are you?” (*“Quel manager êtes-vous?” Editions d’Organisation*)