WHERE ARE THE GROWN-UPS?
DEVELOPING MATURE LEADERS

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SUMMARY

Our current stories about leadership are inadequate. Not that a new story is needed: instead we must return to an old one, invented every time the world reaches a certain level of complexity. To paraphrase Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher in 6th Century BC China, (another time of great social complexity), "Bad leaders are hated and feared, good leaders are loved and admired, and with great leaders, the people say, 'We did it ourselves.'"

Those great leaders lead through their being, their presence. They open a space inside of which people seem to enlarge, to glow with the illumination of a shared call to action, and to resonate together powerfully. The result is the magic of focused and coordinated action. Fully themselves, they invite others into a story of deep commitment and profound results.

In this article, we look at three overlapping stories about leadership. The first is the old story of heroic leadership. The second is the more current story of collaborative leadership. The third is the story of leadership when things must be made to make sense before action can be taken -- dialogic leadership. We explore what prevents us from reaching maturity in all three of those stories and how to address such obstacles.

THE OLD STORY

The oldest leadership story is the hero who slays the monster. It is the equation of leader with superhero, whose legacy we still struggle with. Wilfred Drath, in *The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the Source of Leadership*, names this story "First Principle Leadership." He notes that such a leader, "being the exemplar of what is right, good, powerful, intelligent, is naturally the best person to provide direction and to know what needs to be done."[1]

Drath adds that this story, like all stories about leadership, is jointly created and held between leader and followers. "Dominance and charisma come from this perfect attunement between leader and follower in the shared creation of a kind of leadership that creates a leader who is irreplaceable."[2] In that irreplaceability, of course, lays the weakness of such leadership. If the leader single-handedly embodies all that the community wants and needs, then insufficient capability is developed within the community or organization: there is no leadership pipeline.

Family-run businesses, Fortune 500 companies, and start-ups alike struggle with these issues of succession.

THE CURRENT STORY

As society becomes more complex, demands on leaders also become more complex. Leadership is no longer the purview of the one who can best define the community's "beckoning, collective future."[3] Instead, many people must contribute their information and insight for that future to be clear and they work to influence one another in that process. Drath's "Second Principle Leadership" story thus is one of collaboration and influencing. The most influential person becomes the leader. "If commitment in the first principle can be called loyalty, commitment in the second principle is alignment."[4]

This emphasis on collaboration and alignment has been widespread in both the public and private sectors in the last few decades, reflecting the influence-driven nature of large organizations. Leaders are expected to build alignment in their organizations, publicly seeking opinions from all sides before setting a direction. That direction is then understood to have taken into account all those points of view. Such leadership is seen as interpersonal and influential, as well as more tolerant of ambiguity.[5] This story, too, is jointly created and held between leader and followers.

THE FUTURE STORY

In the old stories, the slaying of one monster often provokes the waking of the next, as it did in Beowulf, when slaying Grendal awakened Grendal's mother. So, too, must our old and current leadership stories recognize that, in succeeding, they have generated a new monster -- that of a world grown too complex for First and even Second Principle stories of dominance and influence.

We now stand on the cusp of a third story about leadership, "Third Principle Leadership." It is the story we need when leading in a world too confusing to continue making decisions and solving problems, because we no longer know what the problems actually are, or what decisions to make. We have to make sense of this world before we can solve problems and make decisions. As Drath observes, now leaders must engage in "a search for shared understanding (which is not the same as agreement) on which the hard work of problem solving and decision making can be built."[6]

THE POWER OF STORY

In Third Principle Leadership, stories are the tool for making meaning out of the data flood. Told and retold, framed from one point of view and then another, stories become the vehicle for sense-making.[7] Shared stories let us see, hear, and feel one another's experiences, allowing us to taste and smell new possibilities. Weaving disparate stories together, we intuitively sense what is and is not working, what might or might not work in the future. Such stories become living entities, "living stories" where, knowing the past and the present, we work together to influence and form the future.

These living stories invite everyone into a new and different kind of conversation, a conversation for meaning-making and possibility. They can prevent both analysis paralysis and premature action. Because they invite entry into the experience in ways that standard powerpoint presentations never do, stories also protect us from the naysayers and critics, who always have reasons something will not work and never suggestions about how it can work.

LOVE: A DIFFERENT PATH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

It seems almost taboo to talk about love and leading in the same sentence. Yet it is precisely the shift that needs to take place for Third Principle Leadership to occur. At the heart of mature leadership is love: love of life, love of one's work, love of truth, love of learning, and love for other people. This does not mean leadership is some sort of superhuman feat. These forms of love are felt every day, by literally hundreds upon thousands of people all over the world, people just like you and me. They are people who have accessed the power of loving their work and loving the people with whom they work.

What's Love Got to Do With It?

"Why aren't you focusing on the hard stuff, like truth-telling or integrity, the messages our leaders really need to hear today?" "Nobody wants to hear about love." "You're on dangerous ground here if you want to be taken seriously," people have repeatedly warned me. "You may be right, but you can't talk about love in this organization."

Yes, it is dangerous ground. If we understood that love was at the core of all truly great leadership, leadership that creates the worlds we yearn for, we would indeed pose problems. Because we would not settle for the leadership we currently have; in our organizations, in politics, in education, or in our faith communities.

We would ask our leaders to ask us the hard questions. We would ask our leaders to invite us into conversations where meaning gets made and value established. We would see that the famous leaders are rarely the great leaders. We would recognize the great leaders because they make us feel more competent, capable, and committed. We would know that "the

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bottom line" is merely a metaphor for a yearning for greatness and that companies do not exist to make money any more than human beings exist merely to make blood. In both cases, their purpose must always be something larger.

So if love is a major part of leadership, what is love? The dictionary offers this definition amongst others: "unselfish concern that freely accepts another in loyalty and seeks his good." It also means "to thrive," with roots in Old English and Germanic words that mean to esteem and trust, as well as belief and faith.

Here is what defines love in a workplace setting: a deeply felt caring for the work we do and the people we do it with, a zest for the life we are leading, and a passion for the world in which we are doing it. This love is not soft and fuzzy. It is rigorous, demanding, and unwilling to be "nice" when tough kindness is required. It sets high expectations and then enables people to meet them. Love requires truth and integrity. It asks us to grow up, let go of our egos, know when to hold our boundaries, and when to fold them. Love asks us to ask the bigger questions -- is this just good for me or is it good for the team, the division, the organization, the community, the planet?

So why is love unspeakable? Maybe because we use that one word to mean so many different things. Probably because the workplace, frankly, is designed to be a "manly" place and real men do not talk about love. Possibly because we have so deeply subscribed to the "rational man" view of economics, to Frederick Winslow Taylor's notion that every activity can be deconstructed to its smallest part and then reassembled and to the machine metaphor of work, that we do not see any room for love in those models.

But I would submit that ultimately, we do not talk about love and leadership together because the hardest thing in life is to learn to act from love instead of jealousy (competitiveness), ego, fear, and greed (fear of scarcity). We are afraid we will not measure up, so we shut off the conversation and blind ourselves to the loss.

Yet the hard, cold truth is the only community most of us have these days is our workplace. If we do not find and give love in our workplace, we starve emotionally. It is not enough (though enormously important) to go home to a loving family. The reality for most people is that the best part of their waking life is spent at work. If their hearts are not nourished there, how will they have anything left to give when they get home?

It is often argued that love, in its behavioral forms of conversation, clarity, and compassion is 1.) not actually valid a leadership tool, 2.) without standing in the workplace, and 3.) insufficient to engage whole organizations in meaning-making and problem-solving. Yet these arguments long ago lost their validity.

There are decades of solid research confirming the positive bottom-line impact of manifestations of love such as service, integrity, trust, and respect. Fortune Magazine's "100 Best Places to Work" issue consistently reports that companies where people feel valued and

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respected make healthy profits. One study showed a seven-hundred fifty-six percent increase in net profits over eleven years in companies which valued multiple internal and external stakeholder satisfaction and involvement.[8] In **Working With Emotional Intelligence**, Daniel Goleman cites literally hundreds more studies with similar results.

Why is the research ignored? Why are our businesses in the shape they are? Why are our communities in the shape they are? Why are our schools in disrepair? Why is the idea of public office anathema to so many bright, educated, ambitious people? If they know what needs to be done, why are our leaders not doing it?

Finding the Leaders We Need

The answer is deceptively simple: they are not really leaders. Whether in the public or private sector, we do not promote leaders; we promote managers. Managers do things that can be measured; leaders change the agenda. Managers seem safer. In addition, we have made the role of leader untenable: we expect leaders to be perfect. We demand that they lead everywhere, not just in their own domain. We do not accept leaders as human beings with flaws and gifts.

Because they are fundamentally not leaders, but managers, many of our so-called leaders just do as they are told. And what they are told is primarily, "Make money, now," and "Don't rock the boat politically." So our "leaders" sacrifice ethics and long-term thinking on the altar of generating twenty percent per year ROI, or govern via polls, addressing themselves only to what the majority think they want this week. And yes, it is just that simple.

And it is just that complex. Because, for this to change, we must all begin to address the hard issues of growing up. We must step up to our own individual leadership responsibilities. No matter our age or stage, we must acknowledge the captaincy of our own lives; no one else decides how to live our lives. We must accept that there are times to recognize the call to lead and times to simply give wise counsel to whoever is leading.

The closest analogy today to a mature leadership role is an unlikely one: that of the community organizer. Ernesto J. Cortes, Jr., a member of the national staff of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a source of much of the organizing tradition in the United States since the 1930s notes: "The ethics of power really hovers around the question of how you go about obtaining consent. You can obtain consent by force or violence. You can obtain consent by deceit, by lying to people. You can obtain consent by manipulating people, withholding information, rendering them incompetent. But finally you can learn to obtain consent through informed judgment."[9]

Many who lead today do so by obtaining consent through force or deceit or withholding. These are not the leaders we need. The training that community organizing offers might be the best training we could offer in our leadership programs today. Its emphasis on serving, on promoting others instead of yourself, and on asking the hard questions would serve today's

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leaders -- and their followers -- far more than courses on supply chain management or global econometrics.

For, if as Joe Jaworski, co-founder of the Global Leadership Initiative and author of **Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership** says, "Leadership is all about the release of human possibilities,"[10] then teaching leaders how to "obtain consent through informed judgment"[11] means that we release the power of leadership that enrolls, leadership that invites the world to participate in the making of meaning and the taking of action without scapegoating or blaming. In a time when most leaders shift attention away from their own responsibility by pointing fingers at others, this leadership is truly needed.

SELF-AUTHORIZING LEADERSHIP[12]

Third Principle Leadership, the sense-making and story-building form of leadership, offers us a new leadership voice. It is a self-authorizing voice, one that says, "I am responsible for my own fate." With self-authorizing leadership, there is, paradoxically, more and less of us. As David Whyte notes, "One of the outer qualities of great captains, great leaders, great bosses is that they are inutterably themselves…. The best stay true to a conversation that is the sum of their own strange natures and the world they inhabit, and do not attempt to mimic others in order to get on."[13]

Strangely, these leaders do not achieve their identity at our expense. By being absolutely who they are, such leaders also give us room to be absolutely who we are. And when we can be who we are, egos dissipate. We focus instead on the larger demands, a compelling vision of what wants and needs to happen in the world. As one Intel executive observed, "The key to having an a-political environment is that you have a burning vision of success for the organization and the ability to subordinate yourself to that vision. That vision is more important than your other personal goals. If you can't do that, then no one who's following you can be asked to or will do it."[14] This subordination to the larger goal reflects a profound developmental step. It is the step where we move into service, and belonging, a step towards maturity.

One example of such a leader is Joe Ehrman, former linebacker for the Baltimore Colts who is now a minister and a high school football coach at Gilman School in Baltimore. When his young teams assemble before a game, the coaches call out, "What is the coaches' job?" The boys call back, "To love us." "What is your job?" "To love each other."

No Gilman football player is allowed to enter the cafeteria and see another student eating alone without going to sit and eat with them. This team has taken the city championships five years running. It is not about being soft -- it is about the rigorous discipline love requires. Such loving leadership is hard work and demands consistently high behavioral standards. It also produces superb, highly competitive results.[15]

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THE BIOLOGY OF LEADING

How does this process work? What are such leaders actually doing? They are actually activating the neurological processes that allow us to change. As Drs. Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon note in **A General Theory of Love**, "Who we are and who we become depends, in part, on whom we love."[16] By love, they also mean that capacity to care deeply about others and seek their best interests.

Such deep caring, they conclude, carves new neurological pathways, literally redesigning the way our brains work. These neurological revisions that love makes possible, in what is known as our limbic system, are central to effective individual and collective leadership. They generate the increased capacity -- emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual development -- that underlies almost any form of leadership maturity.

Jim Collins concludes his chapter on leadership in **Good to Great** by discussing the question of whether one has to sacrifice having a great life in order to work for a great company. Just the opposite, he concludes: The leaders of great companies "clearly loved what they did, largely because they loved who they did it with. For no matter what we achieve, if we don't spend the vast majority of our time with people we love and respect, we cannot possibly have a great life."[17] In leadership, love, as defined earlier, becomes both cause and effect, both source and action.

Finding the Grown-ups

Mature leaders are people who can act in all three leadership stories (heroic, collaborative, and dialogic) as needed. Another part of maturity is that you can be fully responsible for saying what needs to be said (or doing what needs to be done) without grandiosity, the secret belief that you are responsible for *everything*. Grown-up leaders understand that there are others to help. They invite collaboration. They speak of possibilities with clarity, compassion, and gratitude, acting in these ways as well, creating the space in which we can operate at our finest.

Comfortable with facing reality and confident that once the sense-making is complete, all things can be (collectively) handled, the great leaders become almost transparent, a kind of ego-less force in whose presence all blossom. These are people who tell us the future by being that future. They make possible a new story.

METAMORPHOSIS: FACING OUR MONSTERS

What gets in the way of being leaders, whether in our own life or in our organization's? What prevents us from fully owning our potential for greatness, whatever form that might take? The external obstacles are easily identified; limited resources, negative attitudes, lack of

organizational commitment, unexpected changes in the environment, constant crises, etc. Yet at root, each of these obstacles simply masks deeper issues. For it is never the issue itself that is the real obstacle to our success.

Ultimately, the real monsters we face on our leadership journey are the ones carried inside, the monsters illuminated by our responses to those crises or issues. Do we declare defeat the first time it is announced there are not enough resources, or do we decide to get creative? Do we allow ourselves to be defeated by difficult bosses, or accept that taking flak is part of our job if we want to see something bigger accomplished? Are the changes in the environment really the crisis, or is it us -- our lack of resilience, unwillingness to learn, failure to see the opportunities that also accompany the changes?

The Monster of Who We Are

The real monsters are internal. At the end of the day, the central question is not what "they" did to us. It is and will be "how did I prevent/minimize/respond?" There is a line from an old cartoon strip called "Pogo" that captures this monster's essence: "We have met the enemy and he is us." It seems intrinsic to human nature that we get in our own way far more than anyone else ever can. Some of us recognize this early in life and begin to address it; others spend most of their lives discovering the power of their self-fulfilling prophecies. And, of course, some die blaming others for self-induced misery.

How exactly are we our own monsters? Let us look again at the neurology of our limbic systems, our mammalian brains. When frightened or threatened, primates suffer from what Daniel Goleman calls an "amygdala hijacking."[18] That is when two small glands called the amygdala, located in the mammalian brain, end-run or overpower the thinking brain (the neo-cortex) because they sense danger. They activate the oldest part of us, the brain stem or reptilian brain, engendering the "fight, flee, or freeze" response. (Which one is activated depends both on circumstances and the specifics of your individual neurological wiring.)

While those three choices have served to keep us alive for thousands of years, there is no denying that they instantly bankrupt the leadership role. Blood is rerouted from the brain to the hands if the message is "fight," to the legs if the message is "flee," and to both if it is "freeze." Muscles around the rib cage tighten so that the predator cannot hear you breathing. Adrenaline and cortisol are pumped into your system. These chemicals support short-term, intensive activity -- but can kill if they remain at elevated levels for too long.   Choice and creativity disappear. With a full-blown amygdala hijacking there is only reaction. The leader rushing blindly into battle because he or she has no biological choice no more provides great leadership than the leader who freezes or flees the field.

It is the rare grown-up who can prevent a personal amygdala hijacking in the midst of a group panic attack. Nigel Morris, founder and CEO of Capital One, the financial services company, credited his personal coach for the increased maturity that enabled him not to lose his head during a week in which the company's stock lost forty percent of its value. After

three years of coaching, Morris recognized that as a leader, he could not succumb to terror, but had to hold the boundaries and create the container of assurance within which everyone else could mentally return to work.

The dilemma in this dynamic is that the amygdala is a "coarse" sorter. That is: *any* element in the current situation that harkens back to *any* element in *any* past situation in which you experienced threat, humiliation, embarrassment, or shame will alert the reptilian brain, home of the fight, flee, or freeze response. Does someone remind you of a bully from fourth grade? Does the boss' behavior remind you of your Dad at his worst? Even triggers as subtle as these will "awaken the reptile." If that past memory relates to something truly traumatic, it can induce a full-blown amygdala hijacking.

This reaction is complicated by gender differences. Both women and men have fight or flight responses to life-threatening situations. Men tend to have reptilian responses to not only life-threatening, but a wide variety of stressful situations. When not faced with threat or humiliation, however, women's response to stress is very different. Labeled "tend and befriend" by scientists, it appears that women's affiliative natures cause them, under stress, to be more likely to reach for connection than to fight, freeze, or withdraw.[19] While probably more useful in the workplace, "tend and befriend" responses also come at a cost -- taking on relationship responsibility when you may not have the resources to sustain it.

Male or female, such reactive responses are not inevitable. However, it takes considerable insight, and self-discipline to prevent amygdala hijackings. Not only must you be able to recognize vulnerabilities and hot-buttons in yourself, you must also consciously develop strategies for preventing reptilian responses. For some, the path to such self-knowledge and self-discipline may lie through coaching or therapy. For others, practice in the martial arts or meditation may be more effective.

Monsters All Around

Beyond the biological, there are a large number of other opportunities to be your own monster, your own worst enemy. In fact, there are monsters in four key domains of life: emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Chief amongst the emotional monsters is ego: that driving need to be the one in charge, the one in the spotlight, the one who has all the answers, the one who has the most, the one who does it all. And perhaps, for a time it may actually happen just that way. Yet no one wins every battle.

When Andy Pearson was CEO of PepsiCo, Fortune called him one of the ten toughest bosses in America. Twenty years later, as founding chairman of Tricon Global Restaurants (KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell), Pearson, (now in his seventies, which only proves you are never too old to learn) has developed new leadership skills. He has come to realize that the heart is the key to a company's competitive edge, and that if limbic needs are fundamental to human beings, then addressing those needs is not a weakness. Pearson's view of leadership has altered: "Your real job is to get results and to do it in a way that makes your organization

a great place to work -- a place where people enjoy coming to work, instead of just taking orders and hitting this month's numbers."[20]

For Pearson, that change had to do with reining in his ego. "I think I've gone from making my way by trying to be the smartest guy in the room to just asking questions and insisting that the answers be reasonable and logical."[21] His move toward maturity was not about *not* asking those hard questions. It was about no longer asking them to prove his smarts, but doing it in service of the larger good. "There's a big difference between being tough and being tough-minded. There's an important aspect that has to do with humility."[22] Pearson reports that he's been surprised at how difficult it is to get Tricon leaders to behave this way, primarily due to the lack of role models.

Arrogance is probably the most common form of intellectual monster. It often manifests itself as locking into a system of thinking that prevents other possibilities from being recognized until too late. Investment in a specific style of analyzing the world lends itself to "ownership of the parts," rather than "stewardship of the whole,"[23] and tends to generate rigidity, making organizations vulnerable to new competitors, disruptive technologies or market changes.

Depression is a spiritual monster that more and more rears its ugly head in the work world. As a May/June, 2003 *Psychology Today* article reports: "One top executive who 'met the monster and made it through' contends that being crowned king is itself the problem."[24] He found the fear of losing what he had was a very different game than the work of getting it, and didn't like the person he became in his efforts to hold on to "it." At the senior management level, he says, "depression is rampant among people who have achieved their goals -- and even worse among those who have not.'"[25]

Ultimately, depression is a failure to have found meaning in life. It is especially unspeakable in the workplace: one must appear tough, competent and clear-headed at all times. The fear of being "discovered," when the price may be a literal one, as when the organization's market value is affected, or less direct, when a plum assignment is directed elsewhere, feeds a vicious cycle of loneliness and despair.

Greed is perhaps the ugliest moral monster, one that can seduce us into self-betrayal, the Faustian bargain that excuses behavior that corrodes us from the inside out. It may be greed for money, for power or for the trappings of power. In all cases, the need behind the thing you are greedy for -- whether power, perks, or dollars -- is a sense of self-worth that can not ultimately be filled by such symbolic forms. Sooner or later the sense of accomplishment gives way to the gnawing of the greed monster, and the search begins again. Breaking free of greed often requires an especially brutal wake-up call -- loss of a loved one, loss of family and friends, or even a near-death experience -- accompanied by the recognition that the hole is not being filled by greater wealth or higher status.

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The Monster of How Far One Has Come on the Journey

What is the source of all these monsters? It is, ironically, our own growth and development. As humans, we spend our emotional lives caught between twin poles; 1) a powerful desire for autonomy, for independence, for self-hood, and separation and 2) an equally powerful desire for connection, for community, for affiliation, and intimacy. In this push/pull lies the wellspring of our monsters.

"Our experience of this fundamental ambivalence may be our experience of the unitary, restless, creative motion of life itself."[26] In the process of maturing, we spend our lives spiraling upward between these two poles, touching base with each and then pushing off to a higher level that absorbs and integrates everything that has come before. For some, it is a path punctuated by significant experiences, for others it is more gradual. Either way, this movement is the deep structure of the leadership journey.

DEFINING MATURITY

Maturity is a word that falls into the category of "I know it when I see it." The dictionary defines maturity as "fully developed in body or mind, as a person." But what does "fully developed" really mean? Maturity is the place where the twin poles of development, our need for autonomy and our need for connection, no longer pull us apart. We no longer feel our true self only when resting comfortably on a pole. We come to understand, consciously or unconsciously, that the space between them represents possibility and we open into it.

If, or when, we stop maturing, we become stuck, unable to move beyond our current position in autonomy ("I don't need anyone else, I can do this by myself!") or connection ("I need help, I can't do anything by myself.") But the pull to move on will never really go away, and much of our energy is sapped just resisting it.

When we are truly on the leadership journey, however, we awaken one morning to find our "self" moved off the pole, drawn inexorably to the next stage, and then suddenly we have a very different experience. Our old stories about our self, about whom and how we are, no longer work. We have not yet evolved new stories to replace them. "I'm just not myself," is a phrase that, as a coach, invariably tells me that life has bumped that person off a position on one of the poles. Thrown unwillingly into transition, specifically Bridges' "neutral zone," where all things are possible and nothing predictable,[27] most of us panic, at least until we better understand what is happening. Frightened and grieving at the loss of the old self, we often revert to the dynamics of the reptilian brain described earlier.

Facing Essential Pain

Robert Kegan, in his powerful integration of human development theory, *The Evolving Self*, notes that growth involves "… a redrawing of the line where I stop and you begin, a

redrawing that eventually consists in a qualitatively new guarantee to you of your distinctness from me (permitting at the same time a qualitatively 'larger' you with which to be in relation)."[28] This construction of a new and larger self and other occurs over and over, whether we are moving from the autonomy pole, convinced of our independent capabilities and fundamental aloneness, or from the connection pole, deeply committed to relationship and community. Each time it involves a powerful (and often terrifying) period of "not knowing" -- not knowing where the boundaries are, and not knowing what should be brought (or not) from the old self to help constitute the new one.

We are all familiar with the childhood cycles of this experience, whether it is the "terrible twos" or the more complex and painful push-pulls that characterize the adolescent's path. It also describes us when we are called to the next level of leadership development. The young leader, receiving criticism from his manager, finds himself suddenly unable to discern the boundaries between himself and his work or what he truly knows to be right, let alone the meaning of the apparent loss of approval from such a significant "other." Even a mature leader, faced with a crisis, can quickly find herself deeply thrown to a state of siege, losing sight of the fact that what happens to her is not the same as what happens to her organization. Pulled from the pole on which he or she had been resting comfortably, each must now experience the profound discomfort of learning a new way to be, a higher way to function in the world. This is the essential pain of leadership growth.

At other times in our lives, the next step on the journey may be internally generated through a call to find a deeper self or a more meaningful role in the world. As Carol Pearson puts it, then "…our seeking takes on a different, deeper quality. Suddenly, we are seeking spiritual depth and authenticity, and we know it is not just a change in environment -- mates, work, place -- we seek, but a change in ourselves."[29] Again we must face the essential terror of not knowing, having to relearn both the world and our self.

Ultimately, maturity changes our perspective on this process. Instead of fearing "not knowing," we relax into it, embrace it for the possibilities it brings, and quit fighting to return to one of the poles. A kind of internal spaciousness develops that allows us to trust that our identity, our fundamental "self" will survive this period. Others later note that we seem much more "at ease in our own skin," and are more drawn to being in our presence.

Performer or Learner: How Will You Face the Journey?

Research on children's approaches to learning by Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Columbia University, holds an important key to how we take this journey. Dweck observed that children who believed performance was a measure of ability quickly became discouraged when they ran into difficulties. Such "performer" children assumed that experiencing difficulty indicated an innate lack of ability, since ability was, by definition, fixed and permanent. Children who did *not* assume that ability was fixed were stimulated or challenged by difficulties and threw themselves into resolving them. Experimenting with both greater

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effort and different strategies, they saw (and experienced) their effort as a way to increased capability.[30]

As adults, these attitudes persist. Performers stick to what already comes easily (their natural abilities), thereby inhibiting the development of new capabilities. As a result, they do not commit to endeavors that might require a higher level of performance than they believe themselves capable of offering.

Learners focus differently: They are driven far more by curiosity than by concern with how others perceive them. Their concern thus is with action ("what happens if I try this?"), rather than with performance ("how will I be judged?"). Learners tolerate a lot of frustration and mistakes on the road to accomplishing what they want. Consequently, their capabilities continue to expand.

Most leaders function as performers in some arenas and learners in others. The dilemma is that, if at critical moments we revert to performer mode, our focus is on how we are perceived by others. We lose the opportunity to listen to and discover our new and evolving self, the opportunity to mature. We may even lose the possibility of discovering the leader emergent within.

If, on the other hand, we can face such moments as learners, if we can access our hunger to understand and "participate in the grandeur of the universe -- whether it is through a great love, a great work, the ultimate experience, personal transformation, or the attainment of wisdom,"[31] then the difficult moments are more easily managed. When we are fascinated by what we are learning, the simple shift in where we put our attention reduces the discomfort -- and the terror -- and we move more easily and gracefully through difficult times and learnings.

Later in Dweck's career, she began to see that feedback had an enormous impact on the performer/learner dynamic. Having assumed that the preferences for learner or performer were innate, she was startled to discover that she could turn performer children into learners by the way she gave them feedback. Feedback that focused solely on results created performers. Feedback that focused on the process -- how hard they worked, how creative or imaginative they were, and how persistent -- created learners. In other words, feedback that focuses on the process of exploration and learning, makes us learners. Feedback that focuses solely on results creates performers.

This at least partially answers the question about whether leadership is innate or can be taught, as well as addressing the questions about whether there are clear ways to grow and develop leaders. Clearly leadership can be "untaught" through the ways in which organizations recognize and reward certain behaviors. When only short-term results matter, bullies become perceived as leaders. If curiosity, innovation, and generativity are rewarded in our performance management systems, then we get a deeper, richer version of leadership. Thus, when we encourage or reward learning and growth we develop leaders.

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Much of the current ill-health of corporate, non-profit, and political leadership can be traced to this dynamic. We have become so focused on immediate results that we inexorably press our leadership into being performers and squeeze the learner out of them. In this way, Wall Street is its own monster.

METAMORPHOSIS

In Joseph Campbell's architecture of the great stories, known as "the hero's journey," heroes inevitably must confront monsters. In so doing, they are forced to greater levels both of competence and self-awareness. Again, in Beowulf's story, when the hero slays Grendel he awakens and must then fight Grendel's mother, a far more fearsome monster. So, too, when we slay the easy monsters as young leaders, we awaken larger forces that will not be denied if we are to mature. We must confront our biological and character weaknesses, as well as our yearnings for greatness, for being part of something larger than ourselves. Those are our true monsters.

Inherent in the hero's journey is the notion that a change, a metamorphosis, is what is required to face down monsters. Metamorphosis means "a transformation, as if by magic or sorcery, a marked change in appearance, character, condition or function". The caterpillar spins a cocoon, hides inside and returns a butterfly. I have chosen the concept of the "wormhole" to describe these powerful change experiences. It is a term from physics that refers to a "tunnel in the fabric of space/time," that fits the metaphor of a magical and bewildering change that drops us into an utterly different world than we expected.

Four distinct categories of wormhole showed up in my research with leaders, each with its own unique qualities:
- Accepting the Call.
- Letting go of doing it alone.
- Living under the microscope.
- Not having all the answers.

Obviously, these four are not the only possible wormhole experiences. Getting fired, the loss of loved ones through death or divorce, a deeply felt spiritual experience, nearly dying oneself, having to fire people, even an organizational collapse of some kind can all precipitate a trip through the wormhole. What all such experiences have in common is the sense of a tectonic plate shift, after which life is never quite the same again.

Not all leaders go through all four wormholes, but all go through at least one. Wormholes have several elements in common. They each trigger abrupt discontinuity, a stunning "pattern interrupt" for the person who undergoes them. Each has a humbling impact. The leader who experiences them is knocked off their current developmental pole and endures

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that period of not quite knowing him or herself before the old identity can be transcended and included in a new, fuller, richer one.

This is exactly the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly that Mort Meyerson described when he became head of Perot Systems after being CEO of EDS: "There was a time during that first year at Perot Systems when I would go home and look in the mirror and say to myself, 'You don't get it. Maybe you ought to get out of this business. You're like a highly specialized trained beast that evolved during one period and now can't adjust to the new environment.'"[32] Myerson had to recognize that what was asked of him now was leading through presence, through who he was, not what he did. It was up to others to *do*; it was up to him to *enable* them to do. It was an exceedingly difficult recasting of his self-image.

Wormhole #1: Accepting the Call

For some people, just accepting that they are leaders, that others perceive them that way, is a stunning pattern interrupt. It requires a dramatically different sense of self than the one they were previously carrying and their world is never the same again. For one person, it is the moment when a question is asked and all heads turn in her direction. For another, it is the moment of realizing that if there is bad news to be given, he would rather be the one to do it. Suddenly a new story begins.

Wormhole #2: Letting Go of Doing It Alone

The second wormhole is facing that we cannot go it alone. This is the move past our oldest leadership story -- heroic leadership -- into something more flexible. It may be that the projects get too big or the complexity too great; the result is the same. We recognize that we cannot work through the situation alone, that a team is needed to succeed. There is often a major crisis of confidence when young, technically gifted leaders realize that they can no longer hold the plans inside their head because the project scope has gone beyond their capacity. This may seem blindingly obvious, but for many young leaders, it is a painful moment, and feels like failure: "How can I be a leader if I need other people?"

Wormhole #3: Living Under the Microscope

A reality of leadership is that you are watched, every move and every word. Your perceived mood becomes the organization's mood. In a profound way, your "self" is not just yours anymore: It belongs to everyone. The higher one goes in an organization, the truer this is.

In this wormhole, you become exquisitely aware of your own behavior and its impact. As Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard is said to have observed, "You may as well pay attention to your behavior; everyone else is." The leader is the one who models keeping promises and allowing people to tell the truth. He or she makes it clear that discipline matters by delivering on promises, making clear requests, expecting clear responses, and

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holding them accountable. The result is muscularity in the story, a robustness that makes it clear: this story *will* happen.

Wormhole #4: Not Having All the Answers

The fourth wormhole has to do with the reality that you do not have all the answers and never will. There are dark places, shadow sides in you, in others, and in the situation that make it hard to see with clarity. To see in the shadows we need a new set of conversations ones that enable people to discern which way is true north, what questions need to be asked, what issues need to be defined.

This wormhole requires humbly accepting the limits of your knowing, and learning to live with ambiguity and paradox. It is about learning to trust, as well as to step into other's shoes and open yourself up to new possibilities. This wormhole most directly leads to leadership through presence, getting work done by enabling others rather than through your own actions. A *Sloan Management Review* article by Kate Sweetman commented that: "…people working for managers who openly express uncertainty and who seek employee input in resolving ambiguous challenges are more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to and less cynical about their organizations, and more likely to identify with the companies they work for."[33] No longer needing to control outcomes, such leaders trust that the people and processes they have put in place will produce the necessary results.

The Courage to Change and Mature

Wormholes demand courage of us. As Peter Koestenbaum notes, "no significant decision -- personal or organizational -- has ever been undertaken without… a commitment to wade through anxiety, uncertainty, and guilt."[34] Whether choosing how to approach a layoff, where to allocate scarce resources or whether to take a new assignment, these difficult decisions can change us.

Notice that we can only change ourselves. If we are to be leaders who "obtain consent through informed judgment,"[35] then other people must make their own choices. As Koestenbaum says, you do not motivate people with techniques, "But by risking yourself with a personal, lifelong commitment to greatness -- by demonstrating courage. You do not teach it so much as challenge it into existence."[36] When we face our wormholes with courage, others can as well. Wormhole experiences generate a profound shift in attitude, bringing us to a deep understanding that our story, like our attitude, is our own. Trapped by it or enlarged by it, the decision is ours.

Ultimately, the changes that mature us as leaders have the paradoxical effect of simplifying us while increasing our embrace of ambiguity. We know ourselves; what we value, for what or for whom we will take a stand, and we have accepted both our own strengths and weaknesses. We increasingly know when to step up and when to step down, and are comfortable with both. At the same time, we no longer need to simplify the world, to insist

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on a black and white, either/or reality. Perhaps as we make peace with our monsters, and in so doing, accept our own shadow sides (without empowering them), we have less of a need to polarize the world into "them or us," or "right or wrong." The answer to "either/or" becomes "both/and." Inevitably, this is accompanied by a growing sense of the whole, a vastly deepening appreciation for the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. From here we can reach for maturity in our emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual domains.

In 1974, General George Lee Butler was assigned to the Air Force Directorate of Plans and asked to prepare positions for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). The more he came to understand American nuclear strategic planning, the more he questioned the underlying rationale.

When named commander of the Strategic Air Command in 1991, Butler drastically reduced the number of nuclear strike targets. When arms talks resumed, he openly urged negotiators to lower ceilings on nuclear weapons, a position that many believe resulted in his not being appointed Colin Powell's successor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Since retiring, he continues to lobby for an end to nuclear weapons.

Intellectual maturity allowed Butler to question our nuclear military strategy, emotional maturity allowed him to take the unpopular positions that his moral maturity required, and spiritual maturity was reflected in his deep desire to be of service by preventing a world nuclear holocaust.[37] Ultimately, Butler changed the thinking of the next generation of military leaders. This is the impact of a grown-up leader.

CONCLUSION: SIMPLICITY THE OTHER SIDE OF COMPLEXITY

True maturity in leadership requires that we indeed attain that "paradoxical mixture of personal humility and professional will"[38] that Jim Collins found in leaders of companies that went from being good to great. It has been said, "The mind cannot endure paradox; the heart can." What we inevitably sense in mature leaders, people who have faced their monsters, is that their hearts are wholly engaged with life. Through their capacity for love, they have come to understand that paradox is indeed, "the last illusion before the reality of wholeness."[39] Whole human beings, such leaders lovingly invite the wholeness in us all.

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