



# Leaders as Midwives Who Birth a New World

Assess your capacity to lead in a spirit-centered way.

By Jane Nebelung

You're probably wondering why I chose the word "midwives" for the title of this article. Midwife means "someone or something that helps to create or produce something new." In this context, true leaders are midwives. Whether you're in a leadership role per se or not, you can be a leader in changing the world.

## What's wrong with the way we lead now?

The concept of limited resources generally creates a fear of loss, which leads to the need to control. This need often results in authoritarian actions, with power garnered by hierarchical position, and with management-employee interactions characterized by patriarchy and dependence.

In such a conception of leadership, motivation is believed to come from external sources, giving man-

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agers another reason to control. Measures, which focus on outputs and outcomes, are imposed, and people are judged against them, leading to governance through fear. People gauge their values based on whether they're approved of by others. Change is dictated, managed, regulated. Managers seek to control the whole by breaking it apart and working with the fragments.

## How do we need to lead?

Why does fostering participative management, empowerment, vision, values, and learning organizations improve performance? Simply put, these practices have a direct effect on performance because they nurture our humanness. Until a few brave souls began using the "S" word (spirituality) in the workplace, we just kept tap-dancing around this big elephant without naming it. Radical as it may seem, nurturing our humanness is the root cause of organizational success.

We all have innate needs for purposeful work with the opportunity to serve, express ourselves, and make choices to determine the course of our lives. This is our humanness. It's what motivates us and brings us to high performance.

## Four questions to ask yourself about how you lead

Peter Drucker said leaders enable the "alignment of strengths so that 'weaknesses' are irrelevant." Leaders' work is to align each person's unique contribution with the organization's purpose. Practices based in oneness, uniqueness, free will, and connection enhance our human capabilities and optimize individual and collective contributions. Such practices lead to breakthrough results because we amplify everyone's limitless potential to create.

You must balance your ambition with the absolutes of your values.

More than anything, leadership is a state of being. True leaders have mastered wholeness of body, mind, emotions, and spirit, and are living with full consciousness.

Here are four questions<sup>1</sup> you can ask yourself to see how well you embody true-leadership principles:

**1. Are you externally open?** This question centers on your adaptive capacity—your ability to process

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experiences, find their meaning, and integrate them into your life. It means looking for wisdom from experience, including insights into how you learn. It includes being able to put a situation in perspective and understand people's very different world views.

**2. Are you other focused?** This question addresses your ability to engage people through shared meaning, abandoning your ego and listening to what others have to say. It means helping people surface their ideas and talents and being attuned to their needs. It is enrolling people in a dream and giving appreciation instead of finding fault. It is learning and teaching through shared stories. It's encouraging dissent to find common ground.

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**3. Are you internally directed?** This question goes to the heart of your authenticity or "voice." It means clarifying your core values and speaking and acting from what you stand for. It is living what you believe. It is coming from a place of deep self-reflection, questioning who you are and what matters to you. It is examining your assumptions to strengthen a sense of purpose and helping others do the same.

**4. Are you results centered?** This question relates to your integrity. It has to do with balancing your ambition (desire to lead) and your technical competence with the absolutes of your values. It means moving toward possibilities that don't yet exist, using your moral compass as your guide. It is wholeness, the full and conscious integration of your body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

## How can we bring about change?

There's really no such thing as "organizational change" as we currently think about it. All change is self-change, and we each have to choose to change. "Organizational change" really means a focus on fostering individual change. "Change management" is an oxymoron because we cannot control whether others choose to change.<sup>2</sup>

The only person you can change is yourself. When you try to impose change on others, you deny their free will. If you exclude their participation in the change process, you close their hearts and stop the co-creation.

When we change as leaders and personally live and lead differently, we invite others to do the same. We transform others only by transforming ourselves. This is our power as leaders.

### A few more questions for you

Reflect for a moment. What do you believe is the purpose of organizational life? What do you believe creates success? How did this article validate or alter how you think about life and your role in leading and creating change? What are you going to do differently or what actions are you going to take as a result of these insights? ■

*Jane Nebelung (Jane.Nebelung@snet.net) is the founder and president of Nebelung Associates, LLC, working with executives to expand value and growth by aligning organizational actions with leader intentions. This article is adapted from her book Leadership in Service to Life (www.LeadershipinServiceToLife.com).*

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>These questions are derived from *Geeks and Geezers* by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas and *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It* by Robert Quinn. Combining these models captures the essence of leadership and reflects a state of internal being that is generative and life-supporting for others, respecting oneness, uniqueness, and free will.

<sup>2</sup>For details on a participatory change strategy that focuses on self-change and empowerment rather than control, see "The Promise and Pitfalls of Organizational Change," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 28, No. 4, [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members).

## Continue Your Journey

For more on spirit-centered leadership, see these resources.

### Web Sites

- Appreciative Inquiry, [www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)
- Society for Organizational Learning (SOL), [www.solonline.org](http://www.solonline.org)
- Spiral Dynamics, [www.wie.org/spiral](http://www.wie.org/spiral)
- Spirit at Work, [www.spiritatwork.org](http://www.spiritatwork.org)

### Articles from *Nonprofit World* ([www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members)):

- Leading from Feeling: Coaching Tools for Interpersonal & Organizational Excellence (Vol. 27, No. 1)
  - The Nonprofit Executive as Chief Learning Officer (Vol. 16, No. 2)
  - The Promise and Pitfalls of Organizational Change (Vol. 28, No. 4)
  - What's the Future of Nonprofit Leadership? (Vol. 26, No. 3)
  - Twelve Self-Renewal Steps for Executive Directors (Vol. 15, No. 3)
  - A New Call to Stewardship & Servant Leadership (Vol. 21, No. 4)
  - Has Your Organization Lost Its Soul? (Vol. 28, No. 3)



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