

Leadership Update

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Special points of interest:

- Deep down, most people know what is right and what they ought to do. It takes real leadership to act on that in defiance of one's peers.
- Everyone can learn how we "ought" to act—and most of us do—simply because we are human.

Leadership and ethics

Of recent weeks, people in Australia (and probably at least also in New Zealand) have been regaled with stories of footballers behaving badly—again! In this instance an event which occurred some 7 or 8 years ago resurfaced with the result that a prominent sports broadcaster and assistant coach has received the opprobrium of the majority of people. (Interestingly Johns has become the scapegoat for the scandal as his "mates" obviously feel there is no need for them to give him public support even though they were involved.)

More widely, earlier this year there was widespread disgust when organisations that had received huge

monetary bailouts from various governments used significant amounts of this to pay bonuses and highly inflated salaries to the very people who created the problems in the first place. In both cases the defence was that those involved did nothing illegal—the sporting situation involved what is claimed to have been consensual sex and the commercial case claimed that the payments were required under the terms of contracts with employees. But in both cases it seems that those involved missed the real point which is "under these circumstances, what *ought* to have been done?"

What is common to both is the issue of ethics.

Until the 1980's ethics was not a central issue in management courses—it seemed to be seen as the domain of religious bodies and philosophers. But since around 1985 ethics has received at least lip service acknowledgment in most areas of life.

Unfortunately the entrenched behaviour of many sporting groups and commerce shows that, while it may be a topic for discussion, its application leaves much to be desired.

Last month I suggested that the time may have come for us to rethink our entire financial system—nationally and internationally as obviously the current one is broken.

I suggest the same is true for our understanding and practice of leadership. We need to see ethical behaviour.

Peer pressure?

Peer pressure is a long-term fact of life. Yet there have always been people who make the ethical decision despite it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was safe in the USA when the

Nazis controlled Germany. Against all advice he returned to Germany to get involved in the fight against Nazism "because it was the right thing to do" even when many of his peers were not prepared to

speak out. He was eventually hanged for his actions.

Deep down, most people know what is right and what they ought to do. It takes real leadership to act on that in defiance of one's peers.

Different ethics?

The concept of Spiral Dynamics (<http://www.spiraldynamics.com>) makes it clear that different people have different world views and each world view has a particular understanding of the values by which one should operate. It also makes it clear that we are a mixture of world views and, consequently, have a mixture of values through which we engage with the world.

Does this mean, then, that there are different ethics for different world views?

A Ministry of Fear

Recently a friend forwarded to me an email, originating from the USA a year or so back, which sought to scare people about the “Islamisation” of the world. It claimed that many countries in Europe would soon be “Muslim” rather than “Christian” countries because of the differences in birth rate between Islamic families and non Islamic families.

Every culture eventually falls and the Islamaphobia currently coming out of

My answer is “no”.

I believe that there are certain things that are always right and these include:

- Unconditional respect for every other person regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, colour, religion, nationality, etc
- Practical support (ie actively involved in doing something for) the less privileged and disadvantaged in all societies—and that includes

the USA is not all that different from the anticommunist stuff of a few years ago. I think we need to remember that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all have the same base – and, in fact, worship the same God even if using different names. I’m also quite sure that the real problem is fundamentalism – Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, whatever – and scaremongering about Islam does absolutely nothing to combat that. After all, fundamentalist Islam is not all that different from The Inquisition and we know that aspects of that

equitable (which does not mean equal) distribution of wealth and resources to all people.

- Abstaining from violence, coercion, fear or any other form of force that is designed to get others to conform to someone else’s standards, desires, faith or philosophy.

Different dominant approaches in “the spiral” may differently express the behaviours arising from these principles but, at least to me, they are the guiding lights for all ethical behaviour.

continued until the mid 20th Century.

The real danger is that we revert to a McCarthy type approach – and there’s evidence already that groups in the USA and Australia are trying to bring this about – and a lot of the anti immigration, anti refugee hysteria in Australia plays into that.

I believe that there are ethical issues involved here which require me at least to speak out against fear mongering because of religion or race.

Religion based?

I have heard people argue that one of the reasons why Christianity is important is because it provides people with a sound ethical base. I believe this is fallacious.

Ethics are independent of any religion or faith. In their book *A General Theory of Love*, (Vintage Books, 2000)

Lewis, Amini, and Lannon make the point that the human brain comprises three distinct components—the reptilian brain, the limbic brain, and the neocortical brain. The reptilian brain is about survival, the limbic brain is about affiliation, and the neocortical brain is about the higher level func-

tions that enables us to behave appropriately and learn at a high level. Ethical behaviour comes from the neocortical brain and is independent of any religion, etc.

Everyone can learn how we “ought” to act—and most of us do—simply because we are human.

Ethical or unethical?

This has relevance in relation to the recent debate between President Obama and ex-Vice President Chaney. Chaney refuses to call “enhanced interrogation techniques” what they really are—torture—while Obama wants to permanently exclude such behaviour from any future actions of any US agency or military unit—a move being resisted by many on the “right wing” of the political spectrum.

Manfred Nowak is a United Nations special appointee who travels the world looking for evidence of torture. He has no doubt that “enhanced interrogation techniques” constitute torture and therefore are banned under

UN Conventions and international law. He also makes the point that once a person takes the first steps towards coercing information from people, the steps to a totally barbaric state have started.

In a recent television documentary screened on Australia’s SBS, one of the people involved in “enhanced interrogation techniques” - a one-time Police officer from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in the US—makes the point that he should have taken an ethical stand and refused to do what he knew was really wrong—but, as he says, he didn’t and now has to live with his conscience.

If we wanted evidence that there is no necessary link between religion and

ethical behaviour then we need look no further than people such as ex President Bush who made much of his “born again” Christian status and yet who authorised and encouraged unethical behaviour from those involved in interrogating suspected terrorists and others who, although deemed “enemy combatants” could equally be deemed “prisoners of war.”

Most of us have, at some or another time, done that which is unethical. Passing a law doesn’t bring about ethical behaviour—all too often it only encourages people to try and circumnavigate the law—ethical behaviour comes out of a brain that utilises its highest level of cognition.

Red Zone or Blue Zone behaviour?

Unfortunately, as I have said before, the dominant paradigm in our societies is based on what Lewis, Amini, and Lannon (*A General Theory of Love*) call the reptilian and limbic brains—what Group 8 Management call “the red zone”. These are the parts of the brain which are orientated to survival and relationships rather than high level learning and development.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that we choose to “go along with the crowd” (Limbic, relationship behaviour) or do what is necessary for organizational survival and promotion (reptilian survival behaviour) rather than confront the issue of “what is right?” and then act in accordance with what we *ought* to do.

In previous newsletters I have stated that our schools were set up to maintain people in the “red zone” so that they would be compliant with the desires of those in power and authority. I

have stated also, that this is still the dominant emphasis of our schools today—whether government or non government. It follows, then, that our schools do not equip people adequately for making ethical decisions—which, in turn, helps explain the problems we face today.

In Australia, the Howard government (until 2007) made a point of extolling non government schools because they “instilled values” to their students. Not only was this an implied libel on government schools, but it was also patently wrong. If a school is designed to maintain the majority of students in the “red zone” it cannot equip them for the higher level brain functions that enable an automatic analysis of moral imperatives whenever they are confronted with the choice of doing what is right rather than what they are told to do.

Passing a law doesn’t bring about ethical behaviour –all too often it only encourages people to try and circumnavigate the law

Some 6 years ago, when John Corrigan, Bill Small, and I founded Group 8 Management Pty Ltd we set our by-line as “transforming society”. At that point we didn’t understand how this was to be done—or even how complex it would be. Bill is no longer part of the group but Andrew Mowat has joined us and we have continued the emphasis. The difference now is that, through the work John has spearheaded in schools, we understand both what is required and the magnitude of the task.

Our data (and we have an extensive research data base of in excess of 75,000 subjects) shows that people operating in the blue zone achieve results more effectively than those in the red zone. It shows, too, that both zones are infectious.

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The “axis of evil” conundrum.

North Korea has just detonated another nuclear charge and has followed this up by launching more rockets and threatening the Republic of South Korea and other countries. The response has been rapid and predictable. It has been one of universal condemnation of North Korea and demands that it complies with what other countries want it to do.

I am no supporter of North Korea and I abhor any form of nuclear proliferation. But I can understand where they are coming from.

Some years ago Israel felt threatened by various neighbours and it developed its nuclear deterrent—something that has always been widely known yet seldom officially acknowledged—while remaining outside of the international nuclear safeguards. A few years later it was the turn of India and Pakistan. All these

countries realized that they had a far lower probability of intervention from both their neighbours and the major powers if they had nuclear weapons.

Over recent years North Korea has become increasingly isolated with sanctions from the west and severe poverty and difficulty for the population. At the same time they have been named by ex President Bush as a key member of “the axis of evil” and they have seen other such members threatened and/or invaded—Iran and Iraq.

Under such conditions the reptilian brain becomes dominant—it becomes a matter of survival. Like Israel, India, and Pakistan, a nuclear deterrent becomes a viable (even if extremely abhorrent) option to prevent attack.

I rate Kim Jong-Il right up there with Saddam Hussein, Robert Mugabe, and other tyrants. They are people

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who have done tremendous harm to their countries. But “red zone” thinking from the rest of the world will simply exacerbate the situation. If we want to resolve this issue (along with the Israeli-Palestinian; the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and other major issues) we need to move into blue zone thinking. There is no evidence that this is happening or that it is about to happen.

Blue zone thinking would seek to remove the cause of the problem. It would focus on the higher level issues of “why” and it would then say: “given this “why”, what *ought* we now to do to correct things?”

Blue zone approaches are just as infectious as red zone ones! If we want change, we need to change our thinking first.