



Leadership Tips and Tools

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You Are a Megatrend!

In her latest book, *Megatrends 2010*, Patricia Aburdene discusses seven dynamic trends transforming personal and professional lives in the next decade. “Leading from the Middle,” she argues, is one of the seven megatrends that will transform how we work and live.

To make her point, Aburdene describes two complementary trends in leadership. The first trend is the decline and fall of the celebrity CEO. Second is the emergence of grassroots leaders from the “middle” of the organization. She argues that together these two findings establish the groundwork for a massive change of influence in organizations.

According to Aburdene there is a growing consensus that a new and potent brand of leadership power is quietly threading through thousands of companies, changing them—and us—for the better. Leaders and managers in the middle are the key to lasting change within organizations. How do they do it? “Values, influence, moral authority,” reports Aburdene.

This megatrend is not news to most of you who comprise the dedicated, modest leaders who, without fanfare and far from the limelight, quietly do the right thing for students, colleagues, colleges, and communities.

This issue of *Leadership Tips and Tools* offers a few thoughts on:

Leading from the Middle

A New Kind of Leadership. Over a four-year period, Joseph Badaracco, author of *Leading Quietly*, distilled 150 case studies into simple guidelines for leaders. Badaracco’s descriptive strategies like, “Buy a Little Time,” “Bend the Rules,” and “Nudge, Test, Escalate Gradually” are the daily mantra of post-secondary leaders. These leadership practices are quiet, modest, behind-the-scenes—persuasive and effective. Badaracco’s research points out that quiet leaders practice restraint, modesty, and tenacity. They choose their issues carefully. They attach themselves and their leadership to issues they sincerely and deeply care about—and then, they don’t just think . . . they feel! Imagine the millions of students, faculty, and staff who benefit each day from the thoughtful AND caring attention of chairs, deans, and division leaders as they quietly lead from the middle.

“Whatever you do, it carries transformative power, because it comes from your being and is nurtured by the values you hold dear.”

--Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2010*

A Quest for Spirituality. In addition to “Leading from the Middle,” Aburdene identifies “The Power of Spirituality” as a major megatrend driving social change. “The quest for spirituality is the greatest megatrend of our era,” she argues. This megatrend is built on the argument that what was once personal has become organizational. In the past we may have looked to home and family in our quest for spirituality; now we look to our workplaces and colleagues.

According to Aburdene, the five hallmarks of spirituality are: (1) Meaning or Purpose, (2) Compassion, (3) Consciousness, (4) Service, and (5) Well Being. Leadership and organizational scholars Kouzes and Posner, Greenleaf, and Collins argue for these hallmarks with their findings on Inspiring a Shared Vision, Servant Leadership, and Level 5 Leadership.

“It is foolish to be afraid of making our ties too spiritual.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Friendship”

A New Story. Post-secondary leaders have seen the “Quest for Spirituality” megatrend discussed in the writing of Margaret Wheatley. In her essay “The New Story is Ours to Tell,” Wheatley offers a contrast between the “old story” and the “new story” leader. The old story leader views the world as a “grand, clockwork machine,” a mechanistic view of people and organizations that ignores the fact “that people carry spiritual questions and quests into their work.” The story is ours to create and Wheatley offers the following description of the “new story leader”:

“Leaders who live in the new story help us understand ourselves differently by the way they lead. They trust our humanness; they welcome the surprises we bring to them; they are curious about our differences; they delight in our differences; they delight in our inventiveness; they nurture us; they connect us. They trust that we can create wisely and well, that we seek the best interests of our organization and our community . . .”

Eating the Menu. Organizations devoid of engaged relationships and community life become empty and sterile. “Going to work is as satisfying as going to a restaurant and eating the menu. What is missed is the joy of eating food and sharing a meal with others,” observe Bolman and Deal in *Leading with Soul*. Building significance into collective life through authentic conversations, rituals of relationships, and the magic of special occasions weaves a tapestry of engagement and significance at work. “Just as there are grand ceremonies for special occasions, there are simple rituals that infuse meaning, passion, and purpose into daily routine. Both speak to the soul.”

“The essence of leadership is not giving things or even providing visions. It is offering oneself and one’s spirit.”

--Bolman and Deal, *Leading with Soul*

Oxytocin Meter. David Brooks has an answer for all of us. In his July 5, 2006 *New York Times* commentary, he laments the need for Oxytocin Meters. He reports that oxytocin is the hormone that helps us bond. He figures hanging Oxytocin Meters around people’s necks would tell us immediately who is involved in healthy relationships and who isn’t and which workplaces and organizations have an engaged, caring culture. “If you walked into an office where nobody is having an oxytocin moment, then you’d know you’re in a dysfunctional organization and it’s time to get out of there.”

Brooks is not really trying to reduce all human relationships to one hormone. But he does use humor to emphasize the importance of human attachments, engagement, and creating and sustaining relationships. He closes with a clever note about all the shortages we seem to be experiencing and says that the real resource crisis is an oxytocin shortage. What’s your oxytocin level as you enter your workplace? As a leader, what might you do to increase the oxytocin level within your team, department, and college?

Infusing Spirit. Can we find ways to infuse our teams, departments, and colleges with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of community? Can we leverage our megatrend status of “Leading from the Middle” for the greater good by infusing spirit in our organizations? “Leadership is relationship rooted in community,” state Bolman and Deal. As chairs, deans, directors—persuasive and effective leaders in the middle of post-secondary organizations—can we identify our spiritual center and learn to lead from the heart? When we do, we stand on a solid foundation from which to influence up and inspire down.

The Gift of Significance. As post-secondary leaders we can help our colleagues find meaning in work, faith in themselves, confidence in the value of their lives, and hope for the future. Together we can experience more joy than drudgery, and an opportunity to make a difference as well as a living.

We are all looking for the gift of significance. We want to make a difference. As the “Spring” of our academic year arrives, what can we do to help ourselves and others achieve the gift of significance? Our sense of significance is rooted in our shared stories. As leaders, how can we create hospitable places to share our stories and encourage others to share theirs? Sacred spaces for spirit and significance can transform our teams, departments, colleges, and communities. Can we take the time for dialogue and discovery? Where will you find the opportunity?

Front Porches. Our dear friend, Clifton Taulbert, author of *Eight Habits of the Heart*, shows us the way. He teaches us how to infuse spirit within our communities. His timeless and universal habits, when practiced and lived out in our daily lives, show each of us how to create community and value each other and share our stories. “Unselfish acts of kindness” and “gifts worth giving,” he calls the *Eight Habits*.

Clifton’s first habit is a nurturing attitude. “A nurturing attitude is characterized by unselfish caring, supportiveness, and a willingness to share time.” Clifton tells the story of his childhood community where front porches were the gathering places for conversation, community, and opportunities for significance and spirit. “The porch people,” Clifton writes, knew how to build community; they valued each other and shared stories. Where are our “front porches?” As a leader, how can you create a “front porch” for sharing in community? Perhaps *Megatrends 2010* is leading us back to *Habits of the Heart* and our longing to be “porch people.”

What is the Measure? Megatrends, relationships, and front porches—as leaders how will we know that leading from the middle, sharing our stories, giving gifts of significance, infusing spirit and a sense of community will work? Our friends from Nova Scotia Community College have an answer:

Dialogue and Measurement

*“How do you know it works?” he asked
Of dialogue. I said I didn’t know.
Like asking if a kiss worked
Or if a hug had done its job.
They say it does
The listening helps, they say.
But then again, how do they know?
What can you measure of a glance?
If you can’t measure it, they say,
Forget it.
Here’s what I say to you,
Toss out the yardstick,
And let’s value what is true.*

--Judy Sorum Brown, *The Sea Accepts All Rivers*