



Strategies for Change:

Full catastrophe public leadership

Part three of a three-part series on leadership and diversity

by Robert Hayles

"Full Catastrophe Living" by Jon Kabat-Zinn prompted the title of this article. The concept fits the challenge of public sector leadership.

Background

As we move further into the 21st century we are in full global catastrophe. Lethal conflicts are occurring within nations and between nations. Human suffering is visible and measurable with regard to health, welfare, housing, education, employment, equity, justice, truth, and happiness. Financial markets are in disarray, partially because full and honest disclosure is limited. This absence of fiscal integrity creates much suffering. In some parts of the world public sector leaders oppose private sector leaders and each seeks domination over the other using political and other sources of power. Fear is epidemic, even amongst the wealthy. While a few seek higher levels of consciousness, many seem to be moving down Maslow's hierarchy of needs (self-actualization, self-esteem, belongingness, safety, physiological).

In contrast, values-based education is available, philanthropy continues, many religious institutions remain viable, emotional intelligence is being deliberately nurtured, spirituality is being discussed publicly, science and technology are increasing our potential, formal organizations are seeking to eliminate hate, and proaction with respect to diversity exists.

In the midst of the above catastrophes and reasons for hope, public leaders guide decision-making that either increases suffering (unethical) or decreases it (ethical). Conceptual frameworks already exist for appropriate principled and ethical decision-making. Selected ones are mentioned below. What we lack are more leaders with sufficient developmental evolutionary maturity to address our challenges. Having such maturity means being in an advanced stage of development on many dimensions (e.g., physically, psychologically, cognitively, morally, spiritually). Public leaders with this maturity will achieve balanced budgets while being environmentally, generationally, legally, and socially responsible. (See "Corporate leadership for the 21st century" by Robert Hayles in the July 2003 issue of Cultural Diversity at Work Online for more details.)

Public leaders: serving the needs of all

Public leaders are responsible for creating "an environment that works for all" (Affirmative Action: From the Perspective of Diversity by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., in press). Who gets included in the all has been and continues to be a matter of significant debate (i.e., immigration policies, criteria for citizenship, age of consent, admission to high ranks of religious leadership, equal opportunity for whom, protected classes, inclusion in diversity definitions, school admissions).

Public issues range from the significant (universal medical care) to the ridiculous (more racially diverse names for tropical storms). Should the Ten Commandments be on public display? If so, what are the conditions under which this can be done from an inclusive (acceptable to all) perspective? All is frequently a qualified all, limited in practice and often by policy. Helping leaders determine appropriate definitions of all is part of the work of diversity professionals.

Public leaders: putting first things first

Effective public leaders guide the putting of "first things first" ("The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen Covey, 1989). Covey does not specify what those first things should be. His writing encourages us to make individual determinations of what comes first. Doing this requires personal development from the inside-out. Theoretically such internal work yields a greater capacity to facilitate the discovery of what should be first for communities (local, national, global). Not doing internal work leaves leaders vulnerable to narrow or potentially unethical influences. Work from the inside-out creates an internal center that is connected with the needs of all.

When ethical issues are being debated there is sometimes a right and a wrong. Guiding decisions in these situations requires basic skills in problem-solving and decision-

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making. However, when real and legitimate differences in value priorities are present, we face decisions where both or even many parties may be right. Examples include issues regarding expenditures for medical care, religious freedom, privacy, and immigration. Determining what should be first in such contexts requires a high level of developmental emotional maturity. In "How Good People Make Tough Choices", Rushworth Kidder (1995) reaffirms the need to be a "good person" before attempting to make tough choices. Consistent with Covey (1989) and Hayles (July 2003), internal personal work precedes effective public leadership.

What great public leaders do

Good public leaders balance the needs of the many with the needs of the few, or the most vulnerable. They foster decisions made in light of their impacts on present and future generations. They spell out and enforce the obligations of those with wealth and power. Effective leaders successfully integrate or separate church and state. They articulate the "balance between the ties that bind and the differences that distinguish" while "creating and maintaining a community or organizational culture and a set of systems and other parameters that reflect the optimal balance". At a minimum, they facilitate "mutual adaptation around requirements" (Thomas, in press). Public leaders articulate and provide

connections between what we know and how we behave (concept from Gandhi). They move us to define essential goals among competing sectors. These competencies require and reflect high levels of developmental evolutionary maturity. This comes from inner work. Such work demonstrates a unity of head, hand and heart. Without such maturity public leaders will be ineffective or worse, toxic.

How do we nurture public-sector leaders?

Public leaders must: (1) study and practice essential habits described by authors like Robert Fulghum, Stephen Covey, Richard Chang, Jeffrey Mayer, Tom Morris, and Dennis Waitley; (2) understand and develop emotional intelligence as explained by Daniel Goleman; (3) seek personal development supporting leadership mastery along the lines articulated by Kevin Cashman in "Leadership from the Inside Out" (1998); and (4) pursue the limits of knowledge, ways of knowing, being and doing (guided by scholars such as Margaret Wheatley, Fritjof Capra, and Ken Wilber). (5)

Public leaders who lead at the highest levels must choose a path for continued development and practice it. Steps one through three above are vital for the survival of our ever-changing world. These steps enable leaders to effectively deal with issues

A reflection for public leaders

May I become at all times, both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.

From: "Ethics for the New Millennium", His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 1999.

of right and wrong. Doing the work described up through step four enables leaders to address more complex multi-constituency right versus right issues. Step five offers hope for the future by nurturing continued evolution.

Full equanimity public leadership

When enough individuals do the personal work needed to seek full

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equanimity, we will have a pool of public leaders who simply need to be recognized, identified, selected or elected. These leaders must then serve all. Though they may not avoid catastrophic situations produced by others, they will have the capacity and strength to lead us through them. ■

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Editor's note: This is the third article in a series by Robert Hayles on the connections between leadership and diversity. The first article was entitled, "Why proactively seek diversity" (May 2003). The second was entitled, "Corporate leadership for the 21st century" (July 2003). In addition, "An annotated bibliography for corporate leadership in the 21st century" was also published as part of the second article to provide readers with the list of all the sources cited in the articles. All of the articles and the bibliography are available in the online article database, Cultural Diversity at Work Archive, accessible through DiversityCentral.com.