

The Wise Leader (Part 2)

By Paul Houston | Categories: Social-Emotional Learning

Last month I shared some ideas from my new book (coauthored with Stephen Sokolow) called *The Wise Leader: Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons*. This month I would like to continue presenting some of our ideas and thoughts for how a leader might align her work with her best intentions.

Certainly, it is important for any of us to **seek balance** in life. The Greeks reminded us that the “golden mean,” as they put it, was the way to live. They sought balance between their heads, their bodies, and their souls. That is not a bad lesson for all of us. Whenever we lose our sense of balance we start to lose our way.

Each of us is unique. You may recall a lesson on Sesame Street that taught, “Which of these things is not like the other?” and the child was asked to figure out which one was different. That is a good metaphor for each of us because none of us are like the other. We are all very different. We bring a unique set of skills, talents, attitudes, and perspectives to our lives and how we lead them. This collection makes us very different from each other. Any of you who have more than one child understands this. I have three daughters, all with the same mother and father who grew up in the same house. However, each is very different from the other. When we come to understand this, then, we can take each person we deal with in a different and unique way. It allows our leadership to be balanced. In Jim Collins’ book *Good to Great*, he suggests that a key for any successful organization is to get the right people in the right seats on the bus. This is really just understanding how to maximize and use the unique talents and lessons each person brings to the table.

We must remember that **life gives us a series of lessons**. Some are very positive, and others not so much. A wise leader learns to take the good and the bad and to grow from each lesson. Each of us has experienced powerful learning from things that happened in our life. However, if we fail to get the lesson, we will find it is repeated again and again until we come to understand what is happening and try a different approach. It has been said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. In that regard with are all a little insane when we fail to learn our life’s lessons. As leaders, we must not only learn our lessons but help those around us see and understand theirs.

In seeking balance, the wise leader must learn to **balance the head and the heart**. Wise leaders want **effective** organizations, but they must also seek **affective** ones that take into consideration people’s deepest fears and most soaring dreams. Eastern wisdom speaks of the Yin and Yang, two opposing yet complementary forces that each of us carry inside. Success in life or leadership comes from understanding that those things that seem to be in opposition are really just two sides of the same coin. By balancing the head and the heart we create the ability to deal with ambiguity and paradox and to be comfortable with it. Not all things fit into an “either, or” mindset. We must learn that “and” is the powerful connection that allows us to balance competing forces. When we learn to balance the head and the heart, we learn to balance power and wisdom.

Another lesson for wise leaders is learning to **empower others**. Leadership is merely getting work done through others. Unless you are self-employed, you must find ways of enlisting others in the success of the organization. Whether you are a CEO or a classroom teacher, you must learn to empower others so they can work at their maximum potential. People who micromanage or who use fear

and intimidation as tools of management will get the barest minimum of what is possible. Coercion will gain compliance but it will not lead to greatness.

You empower others by demonstrating a belief in who they are and what they might do. Captain Jean-Luc Picard, the fictional captain of the starship Enterprise on *Star Trek: The New Generation*, empowered his crew by telling them to “make it so.” He didn’t sit them down and harangue them on how to do it or threaten them with their lives if they didn’t make it so; he just let them know he believed in them and their ability to find a way. The idea of enlisting your crew to “make it so” is the essence of wise leadership. You must set expectations but then step aside so your team can show you what they can do. The world is full of micromanagers who try to solve other people’s problems rather than giving them the power to solve them for themselves. To empower others you must rely on the lessons of trust and forgiveness. You must trust them to do the work, then be prepared to forgive them for not doing it the way you might have. When you learn to let go of the need to control every facet of the organization, you will see remarkable growth and success.

Finally, wise leaders understand the power of **synergy**-the idea that that individuals working together can exceed the sum of their parts. When wise leaders learn to empower others by listening to them, using their ideas, trusting them to do what is expected, and then allowing them to work with others, they can throw away the annual plan and the established quotas out the window because the results will exceed expectations.

(*The Wise Leader: Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons* is available through iUniverse Press, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble. It is also available for Kindle and Nook.)