

The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 4: **Fire**

Glow

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 4.1

By Tom Brown

- *A poem should not mean
But be.*

— Lawyer, Poet, Lecturer
Archibald MacLeish
(1892 - 1982),
in “Ars Poetica”



The human race
Now runs in place,
Exclaiming, “Little
We don’t know!”

Yet mark its path,
Count all it hath;
One truth’s been lost:
We are born to glow.

We started out from land untamed,
From boundless rock and root.
Only man could see
Past trunks of trees,
Through river’s roar;
Creating, we did grow.

On farms, in mines,
From seas to timberlines,
We shovelled, cast, and cut,
Our progress never slowed.

Till now.
We’ve trounced this planet’s wealth
And claimed it as our own.

And every house and every car,
Each creature comfort known —
Yes, every shoe and every phone —
Shouts our presence home.

We’ve made the world
Reflect ourselves:
Our wishes ceaseless flow.
The human mind,
Stretched enterprise-wide,
Hungers still to grow.

Then doubt not that —
From infant wiggle
To elder amble slow —
Within each breast
The spark *is* there.
We are born to glow.

The human mark,
How we most shine,
Exceeds accounting line.
Accrue? Create?
Don’t hesitate.



Glow

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We are born to glow.
On mankind’s cake
Our time is marked
By candles,
The progress show.

Each new Age
Inspires a wish —
Each wish a gift —
'Cross wax alit,
It blows and blows.

But wax snuffed out
Is not the flame
Tomorrow yearns to know.

What was the wish?
What was the wish?
We are born to glow.

The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 4: **Fire**

Flickers

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 4.2

By Tom Brown

- *I sing the body electric.
I celebrate the me yet to come.
I toast to my own reunion,
When I become one with the sun.*

— Academy Award Winning Songwriter
Dean Pitchford,
from the movie, *Fame*



We are born to glow.
We aspire to it. We
yearn for it. We
dread long periods without it.
We curse what blocks it. We
embrace all that animates it. We
wither when it's lost. We
flourish when it's found. A life
lacking glow is mere existence
— no, *less*.

Our capacity to glow comes
from five “flickers,” five human
tendencies which can ignite an
average man or woman to do
extraordinary things. We are
born with the innate talents to
face any churn and surpass its
awesomeness with awe-
inspiring affirmations of our
own drafting. These flickers,
properly fanned, light the
kindling for leadership.

Exploration — A normal infant, once
conscious of the world beyond her home
realm, senses that there is “more” — “out
there” and instinctively begins *to explore*,

to see for herself the frontiers beyond —
and, in time and if unimpeded, goes
beyond beyond.

Spy the young one resting on the back
porch at home. When fed, when rested,
when comfortable and lounging, it will
only be a matter of time, perhaps

The awareness that we can explore is what first ignites human potential.

minutes, before the hunger to pry, dig
and search overcomes all reasons to shut
eyes and sleep away the afternoon — so
she begins to roam and poke. The
mystery just over the back fence is, in
time, supplanted by the mystery of entire
new worlds, new planets, new
possibilities. The awareness that we *can*
explore is what first ignites human
potential.

When Carl Sandburg shared that, “I don’t
know where I’m going, but I’m on my
way,” he hinted at the life of perpetual
quest that we all seek. Robert Louis
Stevenson is one author whose books
(*Treasure Island, Tales From The South
Seas*) spotlight people (and reveal a
personality) who would not keep safe or
stay put. In what clearly reads like an
autobiographical essay, he once wrote
about a fable he heard “that touches near
the quick of life.”

For Stevenson, the “quick of life,” *the essential reason to be*, was all about exploring. The key-to-life analogy for him was in the song of a bird, the strange melody that opens one’s eyes to new prospects containing boundless potential. Once the song of the bird is heard and acknowledged, few can resist following its siren warble. Stevenson was captivated by “the fable of the monk who passed into the woods, heard a bird break into song, hearkened a trill or two, and found himself on his return a stranger at his convent gates.” But make no mistake: Stevenson was not spinning words into mere fictions when he wrote of this. “It is not only in the woods that this enchanter carols,” he says, “All life that is not merely mechanical is spun out of two strands: seeking for the bird and hearing him.”

Life, from the start, was never meant to be an exercise of running in place, and a life with glow starts with a profound appetite to explore, both physically and mentally. John Lewis, the man who founded the Committee (changed to “Congress” in 1938) for Industrial Organization, the “CIO” in AFL/CIO, is oft cited as a man dedicated to keeping things in check, secure. Isn’t it a revelation, then, that Lewis, one of the fathers of the modern labor movement, asserted that branching out and breaking free is the center of life? “Everything of importance in this world has been accomplished by the free inquiring spirit. The preservation of that spirit is more important than any social system.”

Our discontent with placeholding and those who govern themselves and others from this point-of-view isn’t that they did not complete a journey; we’re bent because they would not start one. Find anew the flicker to explore deep inside you and it is impossible to see the world other than as Katherine Anne Porter saw it: “There are so many things we are capable of, that we could be or do. The potentialities are so great that we never, any of us, are more than one-fourth fulfilled.”

Quite.

Enthusiasm — The explorations of a child inevitably lead to something, somewhere, that transfixes him. A youthful, natural, unvarnished enthusiasm bubbles to the surface, melting time in its exuberance; enthusiasm is the second flicker. Perhaps scraps of construction timber, perhaps a sandlot baseball game, perhaps a playful kitten: the possibilities for something to be enthusiastic about are boundless. Who knows? The magic of their initial allure may just be the life imprinting of the future builder or architect, sports Olympian, or veterinarian.

“Enthusiasm is the electricity of life,” wrote photographer Gordon Parks, who added that “Enthusiasm is natural; it is being alive, taking the initiative, seeing the importance of what you do, giving it dignity and making what you do important to yourself and to others.”

No one I've met who has derived energy from the flicker of a deep, unrelenting *enthusiasm* for some new idea or project denies that it is a critical part of leadership. Dick Richards, who wrote *Artful Work* (Berrett-Koehler, 1995), once shared with me that his drafting of the book created a fierce internal dedication to get it done. But it's the message of the book that bears relevance here: "Leaders create by activating the energy of followers, much as a painter activates the energy of paint and a poet activates the energy of words."

Richards would have worked well with Claude Monet, the revolutionary advocate of impressionism whose works we now wait in line for hours to glimpse. Monet once shared what drove him to produce such masterpieces: "You must know I'm totally absorbed in my work."

The human urge to be giddy over an activity that continually amazes and delights is basic, irrefutable.

These landscapes of water and reflections have become an obsession. It's quite beyond my powers at my age, and yet I want to succeed in expressing what I feel."

Martha Graham, the great choreographer, used to speak on keeping "the channel

open." She spoke of "a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action." She was right.

The human urge to be giddy over an activity that continually amazes and delights is basic, irrefutable. Graham felt that "there is only one you in all time" and so therefore it was critical to find your life's enthusiasm and exploit it: "Because there is only one you in all time, this expression is unique and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium, and be lost. The world will not have it." To wrap up the point with a bow, she avers, "It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep the channel open."

On this point, creative artists and business artists seem to agree: no passion, no purpose. Even as he approached 90, Harold Geneen, the "conglomerateur" who made ITT into a \$30-billion business case for legions of B-school students to examine, remained in the world of business even after he left ITT. He wrote *The Synergy Myth* (St. Martin's Press, 1997) to place a verbal capstone on his nine decades of life experience. So how does he begin the book? He starts with an exclamation point: "Go Ahead, Jump!" He talks about his own enthusiasm for taking risks, citing as support people like the former CEO of Coca-Cola, Roberto Goizueta, "You can stumble only if you're moving."

One of my favorite endorsements for enthusiasm as a life force comes from a most surprising source. Dr. Jean-Louis Etienne achieved distinction by *walking* alone to the North Pole. Plainly, this was not done as a bizarre way to stay in shape or some such. His achievement is one of harnessing life's energy and channeling it into an explorer's dream:

There are two great times of happiness — when you are haunted by a dream, and when you realize it. Between the two there's a strong urge to let it all drop. But you have to follow your dreams to the end.

There are abandoned bicycles in every garage because their owners' backsides got too sore the first time they rode them. They didn't understand that pain is a necessary part of learning. I almost gave up a thousand times before reaching those moments of happiness when I forgot that I was cold. You can accomplish this through painting or music or anything, as long as you concede that, before you can play a Bach sonata, you must first learn to play the scales.

“Playing the scales” is a perfect segue to the third flicker that helps us glow.

Resourcefulness — Alexander Graham Bell, whose explorations with electrical pulses presaged the telephonic world we enjoy today, was an inventor who was certainly fueled by the surge of energy that comes from exploration and



The Body Electric

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enthusiasm. But we enjoy the fruits of his life today because he found the resources to make his dream a reality.

Resourcefulness is the third flicker. When a leader is resourceful, she is scoping every conceivable way to move an idea forward. Foiled by a dead end, she laughs and looks for another door to open, just as Bell advised: “When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

This is the same never-be-stopped spirit of frontiersman Daniel Boone, who said with the straightest of faces (I surmise),

“No, I can’t say I was ever lost, but I was bewildered once for three days.” Want an updated version of that? Try one of the sharpest blades ever to hit ice, hockey pro Wayne Gretzky: “One hundred percent of the shots you don’t take don’t go in.”

Again, watch the youthful state we all enjoy during our precious early years. How many kids ever give up after the first slip off the couch or the first fall from the bicycle? Even children who will never get close to Mount Everest can tackle a steep slope in a park and find it, at first, unscalable. Without the guidance of any adult counselor, kids I’ve watched will start to scout for any scrap of rope, any branch, any thing that will make an upward ascent possible. Even beyond the challenge of getting up the hill, kids seem to naturally reflect the effervescence that comes from stretching their minds — to achieve new capabilities as much as conquer a specific task.

Even kids who can’t remember if Franklin Roosevelt was president, or when, will echo his spirit in their own behavior and demonstrate what leaders rely on as the third flicker to create life glow: “It is common sense to take a method and try it; if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

Erma Bombeck is widely known as a syndicated columnist who made daily living into a kind of running, humorous skit. But she sometimes showed a serious

...a “Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal” that was flatly beyond the ability of any individual or small team to achieve.

side, as when she confided: “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left but could say, ‘I used everything you gave me.’ “

Steven Jobs, in his initial stint as founder and leader of Apple Computer, used to talk about the importance of people having to “scrounge” for the resources to make a project go. In many conversations with Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, whose best-selling *Built to Last* (Harper-Business, 1994) catalogs the driving forces behind 18 legendary companies, I was struck by the frequency of their use of the term “BHAG.” They fervently maintain that part of the leadership secrets of companies like Marriott, IBM, Nordstrom, American Express, and Walt Disney was a “Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal” that was flatly beyond the ability of any individual or small team to achieve. The function of the goal is plainly the flicker it generates in an entire company to reach out and find resources to make something audacious today a commonplace tomorrow.

But a BHAG need not be “a man on the moon by the end of this decade,” the endlessly-quoted audacious goal that is now part of John F. Kennedy’s legend. Consider something much less complex than space exploration — that zipper on your clothing, for example. Robert Friedel wrote a 288-page book about the resourcefulness of the innovators who hit barrier after barrier trying to perfect and then market what is now a given in apparel design. The only reason the development and social acceptance of the simple zipper happened was because those whose lives were enmeshed by this device had to develop new ways to make it work — or make it pay.

In *Zipper* (Norton, 1996), Friedel emphasizes this point about the big lessons which should be learned from this basic human invention: “What is clear without delving into psychology and cognitive processes,” says Friedel, “is that the human mind is indeed capable of formulating novel ways of doing things or making things and does so often, stimulated not by specific hurdles to be overcome but by possibilities that present themselves through new knowledge, new resources, or new combinations of the familiar.”

Resolve — When a child does strike out after 10 times at bat, when she finds that a ballet leap causes only consternation and sprains, when a project for the Science Fair explodes on the kitchen

counter, whenever leaders are stopped — only the flicker of *resolve* can provide the wherewithal to be resilient, to bounce back. Encounter the youth who spurns the status quo (especially a *negative* status quo!) and you can learn a critical lesson in leadership.

The British religious leader of the 19th Century, John Henry Newman, extolled the leadership intellect which “has been

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back.**

disciplined to the perfection of its powers.” His comments are an encomium to a leader’s need to respect resolve as a critical flicker:

But the intellect, which has been disciplined to the perfection of its powers, which knows, and thinks while it knows, which has learned to leaven the dense mass of facts and events with the elastic force of reason, such an intellect cannot be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous, cannot be at a loss, cannot but be patient, collected, and majestically calm, because it discerns the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, the law in every

interruption, the limit in each delay;
because it ever knows where it stands,
and how its path lies from one point to
another.

It may seem a long stretch to go from Cardinal Newman to college and pro basketball coach Rick Pitino, but there is some alignment in their life philosophies. Pitino's pop best seller, *Success Is A Choice* (Broadway, 1997) dedicates an entire chapter to how important it is to "Be Ferociously Persistent." He comments that "The people who will ultimately pull ahead ... are people who go after it [their life goals] day after day.

At last it dawned on me that these obstacles *were my life.*

They keep raising the bar, becoming neither discouraged by pitfalls nor complacent by success. They understand that the pursuit of excellence is a marathon, not a sprint. It's a journey, not some little day trip."

Ernest Hemingway once remarked, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places." A century earlier, scientist Thomas Henry Huxley noted the same flicker required to achieve glow: "Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done,

whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned...."

Bette Howland, writing in *Reader's Digest* in 1990, subtly puts a more human face on resolve: "For a long time it seemed to me that real life was about to begin, but there was always some obstacle in the way. Something had to be got through first, some unfinished business; time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles *were my life.*" Nicely said. But, more importantly, what she is highlighting is the profound ability of leaders to act in defiance of all obstacles and in support of what they enthusiastically believe to be important and relevant.

Put an academic tint on this and you can cite noted work and organizational psychologist Abraham Maslow, who believed that a leader thinks this way: "I can feel guilty about the past, apprehensive about the future, but only in the present can I act." Maslow notes that "The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness." More than that, it is a source of glow. Christopher Plummer once staged a bravo one-man play about John Barrymore, often cited as "the actor's actor." One thing Barrymore seemed to model was resolve: "The harder the slap, the greater the artist."

In the world of finance, it's not Barrymore, of course, that people recall with reverence, but names like Rothschild.

Nathan Meyer Rothschild was the founder of the London branch of the banking dynasty that was monumentally important to the British government in the early 19th Century, as its treasury became strained by a war economy. “I have to keep breathing,” he once said, as a testimony to resolve, “It’ll be the worst business mistake if I don’t.” Rothschild’s point of humor is also a perfect transition to the fifth flicker.

Contribution — All of us have experienced the sullen child who, in a flurry of family activity, will sit aloof in some corner, sulking. But the basic tendency of kids I know or have watched is to help, *to contribute*. More often than not, children will volunteer to spread a

The only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a purpose.

picnic tablecloth, or fill cups with ice. Putting out the trash or mowing the lawn, I’ll grant you, can become “chores” in the fullest sense of that word. But the same youth, sluggish with a mower, are often devoutly committed to a cause they believe in. Few churches and few basketball teams would survive without the glow of young people doing work,

often hard, that does not pay anything more than the chance to contribute to a better society. Want to find the candidate with the best chance for election? Look for legions of youth actively tacking signs to telephone poles on her behalf.

Did Rothschild, when practicing his trade, make a profit? Without doubt. But his business biography as a whole stands for something more. He made a contribution. William Cowper, in the 1700’s, was sensitive to this: “Existence is a strange bargain. Life owes us little; we owe it everything. The only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a purpose.” Can you name *anyone* you admire today as a leader who is driven solely and exclusively by the aggregation of money? I’d guess not. And I lament if you do.

Carl Sagan is a perfect example. His tragic loss to the world of astronomy and space exploration is, indeed, sad. Here’s a man whose academic achievements were matched by his commercial success. His *Cosmos* series on PBS was one of the defining shows for television excellence in the ’70s.

But one never viewed Sagan primarily as a money-maker; he never confused greed with making a positive contribution. Perhaps his own words will explain why: “If we are insignificant in the sense that we occupy a tiny planet of a humdrum sun off in the boondocks of an average galaxy, with 400 billion other stars in that galaxy, that just means that if we want to

be important, then we have to do something important. It's not granted to us by the mere fact that we have been born."

The turn-of-the-century Harvard president, Charles W. Eliot, said simply, "Be unselfish." He expanded, "If you think of yourself only, you cannot develop because you are choking the source of development, which is spiritual expansion through thought for others." Call it idealistic, religious, or altruistic, but I don't believe leaders ever act for long without an eye toward a legacy that goes beyond a ledger entry. This is not to say they don't care about solvency — yea, profitability; but emphatically, the leaders of tomorrow are the children of today who are searching for ever-larger ways to give back, to contribute.

As a youth, I bumped into this thought by Bessie A. Stanley, whose greatest personal contribution may be these immortal lines:

He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men, the trust of pure women and the love of little children; who has left the world a better place than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction.

Impractical? Silly? Only in a world whose pulse is regulated by placeholders. And while it is easy to point to people like David Bollier, who wrote the 1996 AMACOM book titled *Aiming Higher* and who can cite 25 companies driven by a give-something-back-to-society mentality, the point is even more basic. It isn't common ground that bonds people together behind a leader, it's higher ground: the uncommon desire to journey to a place no one has been before.

The title of "leader," after all the hoopla and fanfare connected with it has been factored out, is reserved for those who helped people and society move forward. The story of famed California architect Paul R. Williams (whose training began as the only Black enrolled in his 1900 grammar school class) is encased in a small, tender book titled *The Will And The Way* (Rizzoli, 1994). It ends with a

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posthumous testimonial to Williams' life work by his grandson. Paul Claude Williams says that he will always carry this thought of his grandfather's, extracted from notes he perused one day: "PROGRESS is that you do something

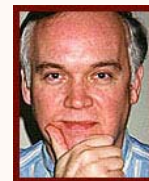
better today than the way you did it yesterday, and plan to do it even better tomorrow.”

Leaders are people who glow when their flickers, all five, have not been doused: when their penchant for exploration brings them to an idea or project to which they can allocate immense enthusiasm, boundless resourcefulness, steely resolve — and all for the betterment of those in their trust. This is enterprise!

The human trek from rough Yellowstone lands to great metropolitan centers, bountiful farmlands, launchpads hurtling telecommunications satellites (and us!) into ever-deeper space — all of this (and all of the rest of civilization!) is an outgrowth of people who never lost the flickers of their youth. They did not simply exist, hold a place; they glowed. More than any other factor, leaders cause societal churn, and at the same time, offer an antidote. It's called progress, and it must never be confused with placeholding.

The kindling, then, for progress tomorrow is not to be found in places exotic or with people unique. We are all born to glow — just as Supreme Court jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. did in the field of social justice. His past words are our future challenge: “Life is a romantic business. It is painting a picture — not doing a sum — but you have to make it a romance, and it will come to the question of how much fire you have in your belly.”

To learn more about the author...



www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf

about the artist, H.L. Mac Thornton...

www.mgeneral.com/4-ebook/97-other/040197li.htm

The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 4: **Fire**

Kindling

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 4.3

By Tom Brown

- *This world... ever was, and is, and shall be, ever-living Fire, in measures being kindled and in measures going out.*

— Poet and Philosopher
Heraclitus
(c. 540 - c. 480 B.C.),
in *On The Universe*



A ccept no substitutes. Isn't that what our parents ached for us to learn? Easy "A's" in school are not the same as a challenging education. The allure of the sleek sports coupe is not the same as the reliability of a mechanically-solid sedan. A crush on the flirty cheerleader or smug quarterback is not the same as loving a true but humble lifetime friend. *Accept no substitutes.* The lesson applies to leadership. One cannot speak of "fire in the belly" without knowing what it is — and what it is not.

"Fire in the belly"? The term is centuries old; the concept even older. We perpetually crave the leader who has it, so much so that many will attest that they have personally witnessed the characteristic in someone else only once in life, if at all. So, from a kind of fatigue borne of waiting in vain, we too often settle for the person in charge and call him or her "a leader." But deep down we know instinctively what is, and is not, leadership. Accountants fully audit a company perhaps once a year; most

people audit their careers, their organizations, and their lives all the time — hoping to find a rich vein of leadership. We dream of gold in a boundless world of pyrite.

We too often settle for the person in charge and call him or her "a leader."

What, then, is this "fire in the belly"? It is not the massification of corpocracy. The telecommunications industry today, like so many other industries, is afflicted by companies gobbling up other companies. The announced strategy is always "synergy," the possibilities borne of two large entities wrapping forearms together in a new array of mighty muscle. The reality is too often two large organizations with no place to go but sideways. (We almost need to invent the phrase "Full speed sideways!" to describe the phenomenon.) So, before its own demise, WorldCom bids \$30 billion in stock for MCI, outbidding British Telecom's \$20-billion offer in combined cash and stock. At the last minute, GTE enters the contest with more billions, "the biggest cash offer in history," according to one news magazine.

On October 13, 1997, according to *The Economist*, no fewer than "six multi-billion dollar plans were announced for

mergers or acquisitions between European companies.” The magazine called it “Merger Monday,” a kind of titular salute to a year’s worth of massification that surpassed the “record \$250 billion-worth of mergers and acquisitions completed in 1996.”

These news reports are so frequent they are tedious. And some would say they show “real leadership” by the behemoths which are voraciously eating their brothers and sisters. But creating ever-larger companies, expanding market share via this technique while slashing redundant overhead costs, does not necessarily lead anyone anywhere. Accept no substitutes.

What, then, is this “fire in the belly”? **It is not the manipulation of money or assets.** The interesting reports of bold moves by the Board of Occidental Petroleum stand to puzzle more than reassure. By paying their chairman and chief executive \$95 million, the Board was able to buy out an existing compensation contract, which was designed to grow almost *ad infinitum* whether Occidental performed well as a company or not. The new agreement, following the \$95-million settlement, is (per the news reports) one that “more closely” links pay to performance.

At ITT, the buying and selling of corporate assets in order to obviate a hostile takeover from Hilton Hotels landed both companies in a U.S. District Court. One major newspaper had three

full-page newspaper ads, placed by the principals involved, touting competing views to attract shareholder votes. The situation was so perverse that even editor-in-chief J. P. Donlon, of *Chief Executive* magazine, was prompted to comment, “Given today’s mandate for corporate governance, this [ITT] board is practically brain dead.”

When PepsiCo spun off its Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC chains (now part of a larger entity called YUM! Brands), the usually pro-business *Forbes* raised its eyebrows at the transfer of a “one-shot dividend of \$4.5 billion to the parent company.” *Forbes* assessment was not kind: “The spinoff is a done deal, but we suspect it’s a lousy one for [PepsiCo] long term. It violates the sensible rule: ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ “ Accept no substitutes.

What, then, is this “fire in the belly”? **It is not greed, self-aggrandizement, or opulence.** Two brothers, both Jersey City, NJ, bankers, recently made news by building what The New York Times called “a lavish Medieval-style castle in the Hamptons.” When asked about the \$10-million bill for building (which has “an underwater sound system in [the] swimming pool, indoor and outdoor hot tubs, a tennis court, 80 gilt mirrors and six suits of armor”), Alan Wilzig said, “It’s like having the biggest erector set in the world.” When asked if anything was missing, he said “Nothing. If we would have thought of it, we would have built it.”

His words reminded me of the corporate vice president who welcomed me aboard my very first ride on a sleek and well-appointed corporate jet, “Prepare to be seduced.” I thought of that when I recently read that Arnold Schwarzenegger (with partners) spent \$133 million to buy a Boeing 747 jumbo jet for his business trips. Whatever leadership means in Hollywood, this act will not buy it.

In her own magazine, *Living*, Martha Stewart bragged of having “six personal fax numbers, fourteen personal phone numbers, seven car-phone numbers, and two cell-phone numbers. I have at least forty phone sets, each with call-waiting and call answering capabilities, five car phones, and two cellular phones.... I personally have three desktop computers, three printers, two scanners, and a laptop with faxing and E-mail capabilities.” In fairness to Ms. Stewart (and I won’t even get into the lines that start with her ownership of 16 televisions), she reveals all this to ask whether technology is making our lives better. But the impact of her comments is one of techno-toys accompanying grand wealth.

It is not difficult to find statistics that boggle common sense. For example, after Rick Scott was forced out as CEO of Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corporation under the shadow of a U.S. government fraud investigation, records indicate that he received a \$9.9-million severance package. Such perversions remind me of Horace Greeley’s choice

line that “The darkest hour in any man’s life is when he sits down to plan how to get money without earning it.”

But even when all is legal, it’s not very funny, and it’s sure not leadership. I once read a fascinating satiric analysis in a computer “User Group” newsletter comparing Michael Jordan, athlete extraordinaire, to Bill Gates, techno-business mogul extraordinaire. Titled “Jocks vs. Nerds,” it opened by asking “Is it better to be a jock or a nerd?” The anonymous writer then broke down Jordan’s salary into every conceivable slice and dice. He made \$300,000 per game, \$10,000 per minute. Counting endorsements, he reportedly made \$178,100 per day, whether he worked or not. The article noted that even when he paid seven dollars to see a movie, he’ll made \$18,550 while he was there. The piece went on and on. Then came the slam dunk: “But: Jordan will have to save 100% of his income for 270 years to have a net worth equivalent to that of Bill Gates. Nerds rule!” Fact or fiction, you work the math. But in less than a decade or two, both Jordan and Gates will be remembered as leaders based on criteria not defined by the size of their checking accounts. Accept no substitutes.

What, then, is this “fire in the belly”? **It is not the destructive use of raw power.** History is strewn, and our news shows are replete, with events triggered by minuscule dictators perpetrating heinous acts of violence on impoverished and underfed subjects. But the best source

today for “palace intrigue” — replete with double-dealing, duplicity, and treachery — seems to be The Business Page. Sir Walter Scott, a century back and without the ability to track world events on CNN, saw the thin veneer that often reveals the transitory nature of unfounded or ill-used power. Scott’s tale of the downfall of Britain’s 12th-Century Prince John in *Ivanhoe*, written in 1819, shows a despot who possessed world-thumping power that struck fear (and swords) into many hearts — ah, but where was the leadership? Perhaps the better question is: whom would Sir Walter write about today?

In today’s corporate world, other kinds of Ayatollahs abound. Whether *Fortune’s* depiction of Darla Moore on its September 6, 1997, cover was fair or not, I can’t tell. But being called “The Toughest Babe In Business” seems to me something far less than being called a leader. The sub-headline reads: “Darla Moore married Richard Rainwater, tripled his wealth, axed Boone Pickens, and pushed Rick Scott out at Columbia/HCA.” Whom might Sir Walter Scott be writing about today? Accept no substitutes.

What, then, is this “fire in the belly”? It is not relying on fads and gimmickry for transitory marketplace success.

Seldom accused of being sensationalist in its reporting, the sober apology (of sorts) in *U.S. News & World Report* made for interesting reading. In May 1995 the magazine reported that U.S. breeders of 125-pound Australian emus were rapidly

changing the markets for meat. Seems that every part of the bird could be used for... ummm, whatever... and that emus could potentially hatch 40 chicks annually for 25 years. No wonder, then, that hungry (if that’s the word) investors pushed emu meat to a high of \$20 per pound. (Americans alone consume 49 million pounds of beef every day.) But *U.S. News* acknowledged that their earlier coverage may have been overstated in terms of leading this part of the food industry into the next frontier. Emu meat is today \$3.50 per pound, if that. “In Texas, where 400,000 emus once thrived, some disappointed ranchers are turning them loose.”

Bagels, of course, are another kind of calorie entirely. The sale of bagels amounted to more than an estimated \$2.6 billion in 1996. So, along came a company that hoped to move the industry into the future: UnHoley Bagels sought to put fillings, from cream cheese to marshmallow, into bagels that, to me, looked more like baguettes. Is it original? Yes. Are they yummy? Hope so. Is it leadership? Not to my taste.

So when a company as distinguished as Disney, whose heritage includes true works of art such as *Fantasia*, comes out with *Hercules* — and then licenses more than 7,000 toys, shirts, and novelties as a marketing frenzy to lift up a movie and lead character that critics found wobbly — it is hard to view Disney as the creative leader it still purports to be. Accept no substitutes.

During the days of the Puritans, the traditions of PEALAGS was just starting to wane in its influence. For centuries, men and women were haunted by the “seven deadly sins.” An amusing *New Yorker* cartoon had a man, his briefcase at foot, bewildered by seven newspaper racks, each one touting a special kind of news: Pride, Envy, Anger, Lust, Avarice, Gluttony, Sloth. Put them all together,

Can you think of any instance in any Age where multitudes thronged by their own volition to follow someone whose life aspirations began and ended in mammoth monetary, megalomaniacal, or malevolent schemes?

and the mnemonic PEALAGS emerges. From the 17th Century to today: you can travel far and never really journey.

Our common yearning for leadership today is plainly not about returning to Puritanical roots that spurn financial success and human comfort. Notwithstanding, can you think of any

instance in any Age where multitudes thronged by their own volition to follow someone whose life aspirations began and ended in mammoth monetary, megalomaniacal, or malevolent schemes? But a grand display of pride, avarice, or gluttony is no more palatable today just because, in some cases, it is preceded by hierarchical title — or followed by “Inc.”

What, then, is this “fire in the belly”? Hank Johnson, who helped shape the modern Spiegel catalog business, tried to answer the question in a book that too few people read. Almost a decade ago, Johnson wrote the following in his “Introduction” to *The Corporate Dream* (Lyle Stuart Books, 1990). His are words that seem more true, more applicable, today, given the drifting direction of the organizational world:

The problem with corporate America is that it has lost its ability to dream.

Companies like Ford, IBM, Sears, and McDonald’s were not built from sophisticated textbook strategies or complex analysis. They didn’t become giants by following paths others had forged by coldly calculating risk-reward equations.

Dreams fueled their growth.

Dreams of a new mode of transportation.

Dreams of a business world driven by computers.

Dreams of taking the local general merchandise store national.

Dreams of a clean, well-lighted place that would please the palates and pocketbooks of young, economy-minded families.

Though these dreams may have been born in the minds of a few ingenious men, these men did not keep their dreams to themselves. They shared their visions, and they made their employees part of those visions. They made sure that each employee — from shipping clerks to top executives — understood the basic philosophy behind the company's strategy.

Inspired, motivated, comprehending, those employees responded. Their energy, creativity and enthusiasm were boundless, and they helped set standards that few companies can approach.

Today, corporate realists far outnumber corporate dreamers.

Leadership is about fire, minds alit with new ideas — sparking other minds to even vaster potential. Johan Goudsblom studied the influence fire has had in the world over centuries. He has researched the dynamics of *Fire & Civilization* (Allen Lane Press, 1992) concluding that fire's discovery instantly became part of myth; the god of fire was deemed to be a living being, "possessed of a spirit with good or evil intentions of its own." But



Corporate Dream

© Tom Brown

the scientific focus on fire, says Goudsblom, was lost in the 1800s, when more precise understanding of "concepts such as heat and energy" supplanted academic attraction to fire.

Nonetheless, one can find distinguished thinkers such as Charles Darwin who have attested to the central importance of fire in human culture: "The discovery of fire, probably the greatest ever made by man, excepting language, dates from before the dawn of history." Lamentably, Goudsblom notes that fire as an analog of something to think about and focus upon virtually disappeared in the 1900s. He notes that the 17-volume *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, which came out in 1968, does not even list the word "fire" as an entry or index word.

Our personal relationship with fire is neither academic nor moribund. When parents celebrate the one-year birthday of their daughter with a cake and a solitary candle, the infant's eyes do not wander. The shimmering stick before her fascinates; her eyes can't help but follow.

As she grows older, the girl learns to adore and respect fire. The leaping and lingering pattern of flames in a wood-burning fireplace still warms her snow-laden heart in ways that no greeting card can ever touch. Yet the gas jet of a stove that singes her arm when learning to cook teaches the same lesson primitives must have waved arms over as well.

In time, the young woman speaks of a special young man “lighting my fire”; her friends, on their way to the softball field, challenge her to name her “current flame,” the one who invariably makes her face “light up.”

In time, the woman will vote for candidates whom she believes will best keep alive the flame of liberty. Thinking back to immigrants in her lineage who stumbled penniless onto Ellis Island, she and her husband will tremble with tears when they see the flame atop the Statue of Liberty for the very first time.

She may register throughout her life as a Republican, but her encounter with the eternal flame at Democratic President John F. Kennedy’s grave will cause her to pause at the price society too often has paid for those who aspired to lead, whatever their individual faults and frailties may have been.

And when, approaching retirement, she visits the almost 800-year-old Cathedral of Saint Michael in Brussels, Belgium, she will sniff the hundreds of votive candles burning throughout the nave.

Pondering the connection of those flames, with lineage all the way back to the time when Francis of Assisi was canonized, and how each candle was lit by a person facing hard pain or devoutly wishing profound remembrance, she’ll think about the religious churn over all those centuries. She’ll think of her gleaming new church back home, her own religious freedom, and the tall candles atop the modern altar — realizing that fire has always connected people in ways symbolic, ways beyond the power of electricity.

“Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of Love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire,” said the contemporary philosopher Teilhard de Chardin.

In business, in academe, in government, in families: the fire we most seek is

**The fire we seek is
always the fire leaders
ignite and then share.**

always the fire leaders ignite and then share. Take two kitchen matches and light one. As close to your eyes as is safe and comfortable, bring the unlit match closer and closer to the one aflame. Just before it physically touches, the unlit

match explodes in a mini-fury. So it is with people being touched by a leader.

At the precise second we see the pure blue flame of genuine leadership in any discipline or any context, at that moment when we appreciate its beautiful force, we crave for ourselves its creativity, its energy, its power and its warmth. So we “sign up” with our minds, our hearts, and our bodies: closer, closer, closer. *Ignite.*

That’s when the great transposition happens which allows leadership to work: we catch the leader’s fire. Like two matches almost touching, the leader’s flame becomes our own, the leader’s ideas take hold and burn on their own within us. Such “combustion” we seem to have forgotten given the “leaders” that grab all the headlines today.

The mark of true leadership can never be stated in terms of a leader who lives divided and apart from a camp of votaries. All must sing and act in unison with the idea of something better coming for everyone tomorrow. To lead is to kindle.

A leader is measured not by how bright he burns but by how many new flames he ignites.

A leader is measured not by the number of followers she can capture to her cause but by how many new leaders she can create to soar with a new idea.

A leader is measured not by his personal power or wealth but is extolled by his



Kindling

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influence: he takes people enslaved to old ideas and liberates them to burn passionately about new ideas with great promise.

Accept no substitutes.

The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 4: **Fire**

Phlogiston

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 4.4

By Tom Brown

- *Illusion is to reality as the smoke to the fire. I will not urge that hoary untruth “There is no smoke without fire.” But it is reasonable to inquire whether in the mystical illusions of man there is not a reflection of an underlying reality.*

— Scientist and Author
Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington
(1882 - 1944)



How long they must have stared. The flame would have mesmerized J. J. Becher first. That would have been in the 1600s. But all the way into the 18th Century G. E. Stahl continued to scrunch his eyes (*Look! Closer, Closer! What's there? What is it?*) while watching the sinuous orange and blue shape dance elusively before him. Hour after day after week, which weakened first? Did his eyelids start to droop from the weight of his scrutiny? Or did his hand go limp from rubbing each eye socket over and over, hoping increased blood flow would boost perception? Even at life's end, their surveillance surely seemed unfinished, their work incomplete: for the core quest of each man centered on knowing the *quintessence* of fire. Yes, they ultimately did claim to know what lay at the

heart of the flame. But as each scientist glanced anew at the candles they dined by, their pauses must have been frequent, palpable. Each fleeting flicker — so tangible, so discernible, so... hot: *what, really, is it?*



Eye Of The Fire

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Ultimately, Becher and Stahl advanced the theory that at the heart of fire was something called “phlogiston.” Colorless, odorless, tasteless — even weightless, phlogiston was “the fire” in the fire, the only way to explain what was burning before their eyes. A packing crate, a garment, a felled branch of oak — anything flammable: when touched by flame, all of these were “dephlogisticated,” the fire the only way that humans could comprehend the process of

phlogiston escaping. The proof was in the ash. Anyone could “see” the proof of the theory just by watching the flames.

Many minds — many great minds — accepted the theory. We may laugh now, but we must not deride. Those who believed were not duped. *They believed.* Even Joseph Priestley, the great chemist, the man who illuminated our early knowledge of nitrous oxide, ammonia, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, carbon monoxide — the man who looked at the lightning rings that radiate when electricity crackles when touching metal, even Priestley first called oxygen “dephlogisticated air.” Far from being some schoolboy prank or huckster’s drool, phlogiston accepted for many for years; it was the answer to any query about “What is fire?” It was an answer steeped in observation, evidence, testimony, and to some extent, common sense. It was an answer that was wrong.

Such an enigma. Such irony. In an Age when so few seem to be touched by the fire of leadership, we sag from the weight of what’s already been published.

But until Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (a great thinker whose life was chopped by guillotine) could more adequately explain combustion in 1772, phlogiston and fire were married, inseparably fused, in the popular mind. Though phlogiston was debunked, it was not truly devalued: could we have comprehended combustion without recognizing the inadequacy of Becher’s theories and Stahl’s postulates? The American philosopher John Dewey put forth the thought that “Every great advancement in science issued from a new audacity of imagination.” As Lavoisier was audacious about fire, let us be so about leadership.

Such an enigma. Such irony. In an Age when so few seem to be touched by the fire of leadership, we sag from the weight of what’s already been published. Call at random any publisher and offer a new book on leadership, and ice will form on the line: “Sorry, the market’s glutted. There are too many books on the subject already.” They won’t mention the hundreds of videos or thousands of audiotapes. And no community college or corporation would think of letting a year go by without at least one seminar or speech on the secrets of leadership. Thomas Horton’s words about management echo well here: “Today there is more spoken and written about management than is known about management.” (And he expressed his frustration more than a decade ago.)

People like Margaret Wheatley and Danah Zohar, two insightful women who

yearn to understand the world of organizations by using the lens of contemporary scientific thinking, are in many ways living a paradox. They are catalyzing many of us who put companies under a microscope using a field of study which some assert is dead. While Wheatley published *Leadership And The New Science* and Zohar published *Rewiring The Corporate Brain* (both Berrett-Koehler, 1994 and 1997 respectively), John Horgan gained wide notoriety by publishing *The End Of Science* (Addison-Wesley, 1996).

Wheatley and Zohar, and others, have met an unhealthy level of derision for trying to leverage science to initiate new thinking about managerial leadership. Horgan also met derision by declaring a whole field of study moribund before its time. The critics of the former thinkers should be shunned; the critics of the latter thinker are spot on. For you can't read Robert M. Hazen's and Maxine Singer's *Why Aren't Black Holes Black: The Unanswered Questions At The Frontiers Of Science* (Anchor, 1997) and not drop your jaw at the unending enigmas whose answers continue to elude our best scientific minds.

"Where is the missing universe? Will the universe end? How do atoms combine? What's going on inside the Earth? How did life on Earth arise? How do we develop from a single cell?" Hazen's questions are bounded only by his book's length. And he cleverly questions with exclamation points congruent with his

belief that full knowledge of any scientific realm will never be achieved.

"A myth has arisen in our time that scientists have all the answers. What may, perhaps, be true is that scientists are more acutely and joyously aware of how much they don't know..." says Hazen, who then celebrates that science is filled with thinkers who proceed with "meticulous care or reckless flamboyance, in precise logical steps or wildly intuitive leaps." He uses every word in his paean to modern science except churn. But, in terms of the intellect, that's precisely what's going on. "There exists," says Hazen, "a vast store of knowledge that we don't know we don't know."

Ah, the spirit of Sir Arthur Eddington is alive. In 1928, a period when science seemed to need a foothold against mysticism, Eddington argued that "Our conception of substance is only vivid so long as we do not face it. It begins to fade when we analyse [sic] it." Like the flames of a fire three hundred years back, leadership has been studied; one could say that it has even been codified. Look! Closer, Closer! What's there? What is it? We must take Eddington's perceptiveness and apply it to leaders.

I will never forget my freshman college course in Logic 101. A comparatively bright (or so I thought) high school graduate, I slipped quick, fast, and deep

in this subject. Before I even knew that, in college, you could drop a course you were drowning in, my grade point average was D-level for at least 15 weeks of the 16-week semester. I could not crack even the elements of syllogisms, where a deductive truth was derived from the assumed veracity of the “truths” which preceded it.

So I waded ever deeper in the Logic textbook and sat in the library till evening choked the daylight; I sat half moaning, half cursing, at the foolishness of thoughts like this:

1. All philosophers are bananas.
2. Aristotle is a philosopher.
3. Therefore, Aristotle is a banana.

“False!” I’d yell at my fellow students, gathering scornful looks from the librarians. “True!” they pushed back. And, if one could accept the premises, the logic holds.

Today, I have found myself many a time in the throes of such mental gyrations. There’s the occasional person who asserts that “Hitler was too a leader!” — as if legions of followers committing depraved acts meets some kind of leadership test. Far more common, however, is the acquiescent scholarship of those who think that the person elected by a Board of Directors, and who

achieves their MBO goals, also meets the test:

1. All leaders cut costs.
2. Our CEO really cuts costs.
3. Therefore, our CEO is a leader.

Or, perhaps:

1. All leaders generate profits.
2. Our CEO has achieved record profits.
3. Therefore, our CEO is a leader.

Logic 101 (lo, these many years) has helped me see how Placeholderism and Leadership can often become mangled beyond recognition. For it is only via twisted logic that our leading journals can herald the woman who sacrifices long-term research and development for a quarterly spike — or the man who embraces any line of business to get more corporate cash flow — or the person who blinks at pornography or usury as “giving the customers what they want” — or the officer who will sell off core company assets. We seem to have stooped to a lowest common denominator of leadership, one in which a prime minister, a chief executive officer, and a mafia don can all measure up.

Phlogiston! Such “leaders” do not even measure up to our best thinking to date

about leadership! Plato, circa 360 B.C., said in *The Republic* that “Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one... cities will never have rest from their evils — no, nor the human race.” A couple of hundred years before, Lao-tzu spoke of the importance of learning to lead in a manner described as “nourishing... without being possessive... without taking the credit... without coercion.” It is a very short jump, from this school of leadership, to read Robert Greenleaf in 1977 speaking of the “servant leader,” and he credits novelist Hermann Hesse for seeding the thought that “all men and women who are touched by the effort [to build] grow taller, and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous, and more disposed to serve.”

One could, of course, just keep going on and on about the different tracts on leadership, past and present. To focus just on the most modern thinkers is to start with James MacGregor Burns, whose 1978 book on *Leadership* (Harper Collins) asserted the validity of “transactional” and “transforming” leadership: “Leadership, unlike naked power-wielding, is thus inseparable from followers’ needs and goals. The essence of the leader-follower relation is the interaction of persons with different levels of motivations and of power potential, including skill, in pursuit of a common or at least joint purpose.”

Some scholars have derived great currency by using a compare-and-contrast approach, delineating leadership by how it differs from management. Abraham Zaleznik, walking this path, said (among other things) that managers are impersonal toward goals and see work as an enabling process for practical work. Leaders, on the other hand, are quite personal about the direction of an organization with the most important work being far removed from practical chores. Leaders, he said, “develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems and [open] issues for new options.” John Kotter uses the same technique, but his contrasts are much sharper than Zaleznik’s. Managers, says Kotter, plan and budget; organize and staff; control and problem-solve. But this is not the way of leaders, he says, who set direction, align people, and motivate.

Though often devalued as “too pop,” futurist Joel Barker has had a profound influence on the organizational world via his adaptation of Thomas Kuhn’s “paradigm” theory of scientific progress, applied to organizations. Leaders, per words Barker once said in my presence, guide people to a new paradigm, to a new pattern of behaviors, a new set of rules for conducting business. “[T]his is one of the key roles of leaders: to open up the pathways to the future. If you think about it, the responsibility of leaders is almost nowhere in the present. It’s about finding the future for their corporation.... A leader has to bet. And the bet is that the leader’s intuition is active enough,

informed enough, perceptive enough that he or she can get the company safely and successfully through the business window of the future.”

More than one corporate or college classroom has adopted the excellent textbook of James Kouzes and Barry Posner, whose *Leadership Challenge* (Jossey-Bass, 1995) lists “five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership” that have been validated by test instruments issued to hundreds of thousands of people in all kinds of organizations worldwide. Their research is evidentiary and compelling. What leaders do, say Kouzes and Posner, is “challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, encourage the heart.”

I recently called Professor Debra Steele-Johnson, a first-rate scholar with psychology roots, workplace interests, and a fascination with teaching leadership. She doesn’t aspire to be a guru, “just” a great teacher. From her Wright State University office, she shared that there is so much literature available on leadership that one could conclude that the term is meaningless by surfeit of knowledge rather than paucity. She also said that she suspects that a large number of people confuse managers with leaders, thereby blurring one’s understanding of either role.

“Every class I teach on leadership, I lead off by asking the graduate students what is leadership,” she says. “Of course,

students always grapple with the question, in terms of fixing on one definition. But, on the other hand, in the guts of the students, they invariably believe that they can point to models of leadership they have known. In our scan of the schools of leadership, we touch on issues like charisma, moving people toward a transformation, stating a vision, getting subordinates to find a path to get to the vision, and inspiring them along the way.

“But the trigger for consensus on leadership seems to minimally require that a person challenge people to be first, to excel, to be great. It seems that one cannot be an effective leader unless one achieves such ends.”

Were I to teach a semester-length seminar on the subject, I would pair *The Leadership Challenge* with the equally best-selling *Built To Last* (Harper-Business, 1994) in which James Collins and Jerry Porras examine the patterns of leadership in 36 companies (18 visionary, 18 not). What’s most curious about their work is the emphatic claim made to me face-to-face: “We believe in leadership, not leaders.” Translated, Collins and Porras aver that the very best leaders are “clock builders” rather than “time tellers”; they are leaders, then, who help others to lead. As they say on page 262:

Leadership is defined as top executive(s) who displayed high levels of persistence, overcame significant obstacles, attracted dedicated people,

influenced groups of people toward the achievement of goals, and played key roles in guiding their companies through crucial episodes in their history.

Interestingly, though many of our modern management minds look at leadership using a corporate lens, their definitions also “fit” a George Washington or a Vaclav Havel. And though, when it comes to leaders, these are all far from being “phlogiston theories,” one must ask (in the spirit of Robert Hazen’s “knowledge that we don’t know we know”) what paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould suggests in his Foreword to Hazen’s book: “If we understood how evolution has structured our preferred ways of thinking, we might be able to transcend these limitations and break barriers by internal reordering rather than technological invention.”

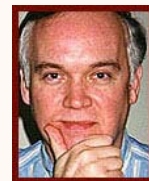
Our sensibilities on leadership have evolved from great thinking by great minds who have studied leaders like Becher and Stahl studied flames. Like

In that state, one can hear the thunder and feel the lightning. It is no illusion. Look! Closer, Closer! What’s there? What is it?

those two stalwart scientists, our leadership thinkers have not been all wrong. *Neither, I would argue, have they been all right.* When one is in the presence of leadership aglow, when one feels the force of a new and compelling idea propelling leader and follower forward together, the feeling transcends analysis. In that state, one can hear the thunder and feel the lightning. It is no illusion. Look! Closer, Closer! What’s there? What is it? Will Rogers once cautioned, “Nothing you can’t spell will ever work.” What is a leader? What is leadership? How long I have struggled to feel comfortable, to feel sure, that I understand what these words mean and that I am capable of applying them to others with the kind of confidence that ancient kings felt when knighting their followers. But the flame of leadership flickers fierce: what can I say with acuity and certainty after all these years?

Just this: The leader’s art is in the leader’s heart.

To learn more about the author...



www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf

about the artist, H.L. Mac Thornton...

www.mgeneral.com/4-ebook/97-other/040197li.htm

The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 4: **Fire**

Sparks

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 4.5

By Tom Brown

- *I think continually of those who were truly great... The names of those who in their lives fought for life, Who wore at their hearts the fire's center. Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun, And left the vivid air signed with their honor.*

— Poet Stephen Spender
(1909 -),

from “I Think Continually Of Those”



When facing times flush with success, a hush precedes the next advance. “Too much churn to relax. To rest is to rust. Let’s make things better!” When adversity snows a heavy blanket of pessimism over everyone around, a tightened fist precedes a positive voice at a higher, upbeat register. “We can win this!” When all manner of rejection and defeat cascades down, he does not retrench; he rethinks. Urging a new path, he asserts, “Let’s try this!” When thwarted by a diffident or hostile world, she pushes on, undaunted, summoning unbelievable resolution to see the idea forward if she senses even an iota of genuine prospect. “Press on!” And when victorious, surrounded by adulation and cheering compatriots, he thinks mainly of how to distribute the personal glory or wealth among others

hungering for the salutary touch of either. “I owe so much to so many!”

True leadership has never been found in titles, which too often mask outdated accomplishments. Nor was it ever to be found in the transitory bestowal of vast power or authority, which too often cripples the appetite to confront the challenges certain to be hidden in tomorrow’s tasks. Nor was it even to be found in the boundless treasuries of the commercially blessed, which too often soften the senses to the needs of the bereft.

As much as we have written on it, as much as we have built syllabi for courses with interminable lectures about it, as much as we try to transfer the label upon those who stubbornly hold back and hold place, those with the true look of a leader are ever harder to find.

“In the final quarter of our century that life-and-death engagement with leadership has given way to the cult of personality, to a ‘gee whiz’ approach to celebrities,” wrote James MacGregor Burns two decades ago. Our progress toward a higher standard, if not a higher level, of leadership has been torpid. “We peer into the private lives of leaders, as though their sleeping habits, eating preferences, sexual practices, dogs and hobbies carry messages of profound significance.... The personality cult — a

cult of devils as well as heroes — thrives in both East and West.” Outdated wisdom? Go now and pick up any newspaper or magazine of wide social scope.

But we know what we want. Beverly Goldberg and John Sifonis could not have been more perceptive; in their landmark *Corporation On A Tightrope* (Oxford University Press, 1996), they remark:

There are those who say the leader provides vision and has charisma that makes others buy into that vision. Those who study leadership characteristics suggest that leaders also need to be skilled at planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying, informing, monitoring, motivating, supporting, managing conflict and team-building, networking, delegating, developing, mentoring, and rewarding. In addition, leaders must be able to establish an environment in which creativity and innovation flourish. The list is overwhelming, but at various times, leaders need to have all these skills....

The question is: Can we summon forth enough leaders for the century of churn that lies before us?

True. But truer still is their comment that “the result of ... advances in management is the development of individuals who understand concepts such as loyalty; free expression of ideas; supporting others; responsibility and accountability; the efficacy of communication across, up, down, and outside the organization — all in the pursuit of the success of the team, project, or company. Such individuals will play a critical role in the organization of tomorrow.”

Leaders will play such a role. The question is: Can we summon forth enough leaders for the century of churn that lies before us?

Why does our leadership bank seem so depleted at such a moment of opportunity? We suffer today from a “Feverel Syndrome.” Although you can’t even buy a new copy of George Meredith’s 19th Century novel, *The Ordeal Of Richard Feverel*, its tortuous tale of Sir Austin Feverel’s life-long attempt to catechize his son, Richard, in a “System” of how to think is applicable to us.

Sir Austin “had a son, and he was incubating a System,” Meredith wrote more than a century back; the goal of this “System” was to allow “man’s intellect” to triumph via the imposition of “a Scientific eye” over all human tendencies to yield to any tug of the human heart. Sir Austin wished his son to be heartless.

Organizations today, even whole professions, abound in “Feverelism,” an overpowering desire to “Systematize” all aspects of business, church, and government into matters that can be conveniently categorized (albeit constrained) by purely intellectual boundaries. Policy manuals have become the catechisms of the corporate world. But our fundamental approach has handcuffed us even more than has a glut of policies. In every discipline, in every endeavor, the accumulation of “Systematized” data has shackled the inspiration to lead.

We have built our professional database at the expense of our ideabase.

Much as Sir Austin thought he knew how to raise his son into “a perfect Man,” we know how to write visions — we just lack leaders who have one. We know how to plan and organize — we just lack leaders with the ability to arouse a common push for efficiency and cooperation. We know how to solve problems — we just lack leaders who can phrase them in such a way that followers burn to address them.

Pick any discipline in any industry or any profession, and you will find a “System” so comprehensive it intimidates. The

base of knowledge is so profuse that leadership has been reduced to an exercise in mastering a “System” of intricate facts and details.

Which is why even post post-graduate training seems ineffective at inciting students or practitioners of architecture, medicine, governance, journalism, ministry, engineering — name your niche — to lead boldly, confidently, with vigor, and without trepidation. We have built our professional database at the expense of our ideabase.

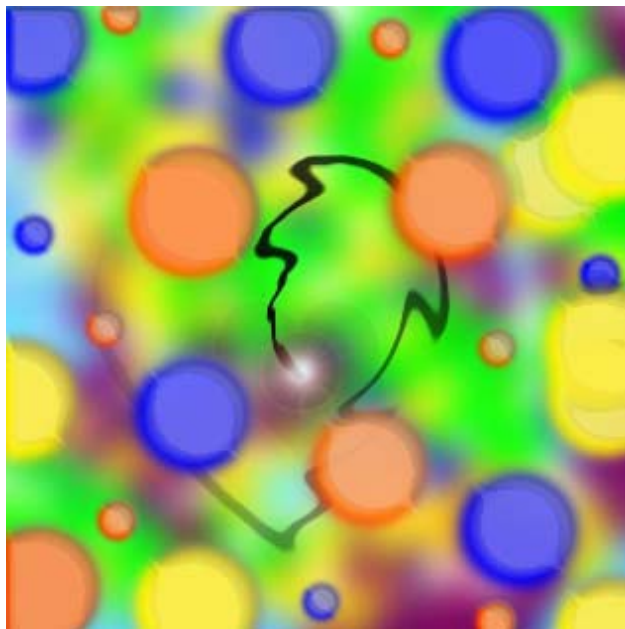
If you want to find out how Richard Feverel’s Ordeal ends, you’ll have to snoop through layers of dust in a used book store. But here’s a hint: at the end of the novel, one woman close to Sir Austin, observing the tragedy of lives misspent, laments, “Oh! how sick I am of theories, and Systems, and the pretensions of men! There was his son lying all but dead, and the man [Sir Austin] was still unconvinced of the folly he has been guilty of.”

Having sat at the side of CEOs, having observed the ways of presidents, chancellors, mayors — and many mighty corporate executives, having directly observed placeholding distilled and refined to such a degree that it has robbed from the mass of men and women even a faint hope of personal progress (the vast worldwide success of “Dilbert” is inversely proportional to the level of general workplace optimism), I have come to recant all the “Systems” now in

place for defining and developing leadership. What I once believed to be the shortest path to multiplying leadership now seems like an insane scheme to amortize it instead. We need a new definition of leadership, with new ways to replicate it.

The leader's art is in the leader's heart. Leadership can be schooled, but it cannot be taught. It can be captioned, but it cannot be captured. It can be ignited, but it cannot be transferred. To bask again in the warm glow of proactive, positive leadership, we must study the heart of a leader; we must strive to know not simply what he says and how he acts, but why.

Around 476 A.D., clerics took the Latin alphabet and wrote their documents in large script; it was called "majuscule." By the time of Charlemagne, as a paper-



Heart Dazzle

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saving stratagem, documents started to be written in "minuscule." It is time to start writing LEADERSHIP in a larger, more sweeping script. We must learn anew how the heart of a leader pumps life into our organizations and societies, transforming each rhythmic surge into the very pulse of progress.

Leaders are first and foremost discoverers. They realize, to a much higher extent than others, that "today" written over and over, and over yet again, spells tedium. They are most conscious of the taproot trends toward a world improved; only by reaching out for new and better ways to get things done, reasons the leader, does the promise of tomorrow become a reality.

Leaders are often tagged as "rule breakers," but this understates their point of view entirely. They are more properly "rule starters"; they don't want to challenge the existing game as much as they want to start entire new games. And if today is a problem to be overcome, the past is an irrelevance entirely.

In any group transfixed by present difficulties, the leader will be transfixed by the potential just over the horizon. We have come to think that a leader has a hallowed "vision" to which a legion of followers subscribe. One scholar defined vision as the "preferred future" for an organization. Perhaps it would be more precise to say that leaders are fueled by an insatiable desire to proffer innumerable alternative futures. It is their

ability — their affection — for always considering entirely new ways of working and living that draws our breath away and toward their cause.

If the phrase has not been coined before, I have come to see leaders as “destineers,” people energized by the invigorating task of finding the destiny of a company, a city, a civilization.

Leaders are seldom described as “happy,” but this does not prevent them from feeling satisfied. Focus more crisply on the leader and you’ll find that she is seldom “content.” Leaders only feel balanced when their discontent feeds and grows into a full-fledged search for new norms that move mankind to a higher standard of existence. And when that takes hold, they are happy, at least for the moment.

Leaders are cheerleaders. The translation of Truman’s “the buck stops here” into the image of the hand-wringing leader burdened by the responsibilities of office is a perversion of reality. Find anyone earnestly following the path of another, and you’ll find an eagerness, a passion, a fervor which stems from the radiant optimism of the leader. Tomorrow is a thing of promise for a leader; the future can only excite, for it is basking in the wonder of what lies ahead, just over the horizon, that stimulates, percolates, innervates.

And so it is impossible for a true leader to defy his inclination to light the candles of others; her love of what a people, a company, an entity could be transforms her being into a kind of one-person pep rally.

Leaders do not take heavy steps; their gait is lightened by their spirited exuberance for the quest, the discovery, that can convert the status quo into something far greater than anyone could imagine at the present time. Thus, in addition to being destineers, they are imagineers as well. And in their effervescence, they naturally encourage their followers with the prod of promise; they pump people up with their push for exploration.

Leaders are synthesizers. They refuse to recognize the authority of limitations. Where others see fixed parameters and “hard facts,” they reconsider and recombine “impossibilities” into new combinations of processes and products. In this sense, leaders see research and development as their primary line of business, not a tag-along to the rest of the corporation. For it is in the transversion of known quantities, fixed assets, and measurable holdings into new and more broad intellectual capabilities that the genius of a leader is established and recognized.

In fact, one could readily believe that the core joy of leaders is in making leaps

from one reality to another, in being quantum in a linear world. Why add when one can multiply — or square — or cube — the prevailing, established limits of today? Leaders consider it their duty to take any and all aspects of the current state — then rethink or redesign these elements — and create a future state that, many times, is so different that “what was” is instantly forgotten, because it is no longer relevant.

Leaders are soldiers. They understand that they serve the cause of a new idea, and that they must be stalwart against the certain adversity sure to confront each firm and enthusiastic step forward.

They are determined, not stubborn — for they are so infused with the inevitability of a better way that, as deputies of destiny, they know that turning back, away, or aside would be abdication of their leadership role. One cannot logically or emotionally be dissuaded from staying on the path of progress if a genuine prospect remains in the kernel of a new idea.

More than this, as people who have rallied others also to embrace the charge of moving ahead, they understand that it takes the geodesic strength of interlinked people to face down the dead weight of institutionalized practice. One motto of a leader is the phrase “Rejection is not defeat.” How could it be? When so many are invested in the present, when

livelihoods have been forged by current realities, when people wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night to

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contemporary “realities” inculcated into their minds since childhood, it is almost a given that dynamic leadership be ignored, or challenged, even refuted — but never defeated.

A great resolve shores up the dark nights of any leader’s soul. When doubts afflict, when go-aways depress, when turndowns torment, the wellspring of a leader is the same as an educator’s. She will help people to learn for themselves how things can be better, how future days can be even brighter. The leader is willing to enroll people in supporting a progressive idea, even if it’s one person at a time.

Leaders are givers. They desire little beyond the liberty to keep exploring,

keep progressing. And since their journey is endless, their need to stockpile a pharaoh's fortune seems senseless, if not shameful.

Leaders know that nothing — nothing — they accomplished was achieved unilaterally. How does one put a patent on a promising idea? But leaders are not, in the current vernacular, nerds. They are not naive about the treachery of criminal minds who will subvert new ideas into usurious greed. Leaders understand cash flow, speak the language of profit, and can elucidate a financial statement. But these are means, never ends.

In the end, leaders shun the temptation to aggrandize their achievements into haughty grandeur or personal plenty. They serve the cause of society, never craving the cash of society. Leaders feel privileged to serve, and so they acknowledge the invisible debt to all those who led before them and all those who will lead after them.

And so they give and give freely. They generously spread credit for all accomplishment to those who actually did the accomplishing, to the hands that held the hammers, to the minds that overcame the myriad obstacles. They divest accrued wealth as a way to reinvest in initiatives just spawning. They refuse to hoard capital, as that is the surest way to mortgage the future just to fatten the present; they derive far more pleasure — they find life infinitely more rewarding — by setting off new sparks of

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leadership as opposed to setting aside shameless wealth or sham titles. They most benefit from the progress they helped to create by becoming benefactors.

A leader at full tilt is a radiant wonder. Just being able to watch his energetic impact on an organization is a joyful experience, for leadership embodies a fundamental force for good. Her ability to bring so many people into both the moment and the momentum of a new idea is dazzling to the senses — and to the heart. There is no one style of leadership that fits all of the broad dimensions of humanity. Leaders can be male or female, tall or short, loud or mellow, strident or humble.

But under the skin of every leader, serving as a tuning fork to the leadership mind, is a heart that quivers at the

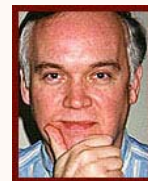
thought of seeking the new and inspiring others with enthusiasm for each innovative idea worthy of inventive resourcefulness. Tough enough to believe in the new idea when all others disavow or disregard it, they are willing to fight ceaselessly on its behalf. And when the new idea ultimately prevails, when the fruits of their leadership labors are at hand, they know that the reward is not in consuming the fruits of their labors — but in finding the seeds of future fruit deep within.

Some consider it matter of fact that there are leaders — and then there are followers. One is up top, in front, indispensable; the others slogging below, plodding behind, quite expendable. But when leadership grows from being a single spark to a moving force, it is only the leadership idea which is out there, ahead — with leaders and followers indistinct and in pursuit. Perhaps there is no truer mark of genuine leadership in action than the presence of a unified body of fired-up believers who are far less concerned with rank than with establishing a new idea that ensures a better world because of their coalesced efforts. Segregating “leaders” from “followers” is no longer warranted; the terms are hierarchical and passé. When leadership is alive and active, common hearts strive to create a common destiny. In the right state, leaders and followers cleave at the heart.

Though placeholders predominate today, there are leadership embers aplenty to

fan, in sufficient quantities to spark a worldwide fire great enough to illuminate the century of possibilities which lies ahead. But this will not happen — indeed, it cannot happen — unless each one of us is willing to take embers, make sparks, and light a fire within our own hearts. We are born to glow, but it will never happen unless each one of us designs, prints, and inscribes our own name upon a license to lead.

To learn more about the author...



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about the artist, H.L. Mac Thornton...

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