



CHAPTER 1

The Heart of Leadership for Sustainable Change

Meaningful Work to Serve a Greater Good

And it is not our part here to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end to this menace, even if we do not hope to make one.

—Gandalf from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

Happy leaders doing meaningful work will change the world. There is something enormously hopeful about knowing this. For one needs only to watch past the lead stories of the nightly news and to read beyond the headlines of the newspaper to realize that in every community a trove of leaders works steadily on behalf of the greater good. These are small business owners, school administrators, corporate managers, and nonprofit founders who earn a good living while challenging themselves to extend the effect of their work to benefiting something bigger than quarterly business outcomes. These leaders take care to make strategic and



Renewal Coaching Fieldbook

tactical decisions that at the very least take a systems perspective that either enhances operations for the benefit of others or mitigates and minimizes negative effects. When these leaders extend their reach for the greater good even further, they consider the well-being of future generations of employees, stakeholders, and clients, especially the most vulnerable and those for whom the stakes are highest.

Ann McCollum, who runs a small business that specializes in wilderness experiential program designs, recently sent Elle an e-mail that ended with this quote: “Be the kind of woman that when your feet hit the floor each morning, the devil says, ‘Oh crap, she’s up!’” These words of wisdom imply that the greater good is not just an abstract principle, even if at first it may be challenging to apprehend. Leaders who work to serve a greater good embody Gandalf from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, who said, “And it is not our part here to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end to this menace, even if we do not hope to make one.”

In practical terms, work initiatives gain meaning when leaders ask themselves and others these questions:

- How can this project or initiative grow leaders and offer leadership opportunities to stakeholders, clients, partners, and alliances?
- How will we share what we learn from doing this work so that others can benefit from what we know and so we can advance the prosperity of our field and the people in it?
- How can this project or initiative include and positively benefit more people and other divisions or departments in the system?
- How do our decisions ensure consideration for the needs of all involved, especially those who are most vulnerable and for whom the stakes are highest?
- How will we accurately report our performance results and the liabilities of this work?

The Heart of Leadership for Sustainable Change

- How will we safeguard against discrimination and exploitation of any group of people impacted by this project or initiative?
- What future will this project or initiative likely create for generations to come?
- How do the processes we use while carrying out this project or initiative care for the environment within which we work?
- How will we ensure that our business practices are good for the reputation of our enterprise and for the rest of society?
- How do our gains from this project or initiative extend to the people who work with us, including our supply chains?
- How does the way we do our work ensure that more people benefit, for longer periods of time?
- How does this work solve a pervasive problem and not just contain a crisis?

The greater good defines outcomes beyond obvious short-term gains and financial rewards for just a few—usually those who are privileged and in a position to make decisions for their personal advantage. For example, the global economic recession that began in the first decade of the 2000s was arguably brought about by bankers and mortgage lenders who made self-serving decisions to create quick wins for themselves and their cronies. Another all too familiar example of people *not* working on behalf of the greater good is seen in organizations when individuals resist change because they want to maintain a comfortable status quo that favors what preserves their personal level of comfort.

To be sure, the greater good includes increases in profit and favorable indicators for the enterprise. However, it also takes a wider view that rejects decisions, programs, products, relationships, and processes favoring one group of people to the exclusion of other groups of people, or that diminishes the health of the planet.



WISDOM AND THE PURSUIT OF THE GREATER GOOD

Working for the greater good is a contemporary movement that draws on wisdom, one of mankind's most ancient concepts. In their new book, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, professors Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe (2010) call for a revitalization of the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom, as applied in modern professional ethics. Aristotle maintained that practical wisdom is highly contextual, showing up as good judgment that draws on virtues such as courage, fairness, generosity, gentleness, integrity, and kindness. Compare Aristotle's reflections on wisdom with the oath authored by the 2009 class of Harvard MBA students and their professors, a group of thoughtful individuals who want to regain the trust of a skeptical public burned by the bad behavior of influential business managers and financiers. The introduction to the oath reads as follows (Anderson & Escher, 2010):

As a manager, my purpose is to serve the greater good by bringing people and resources to create value that no single individual can build alone. Therefore I will seek a course that enhances the value my enterprise can create for society over the long term. I recognize that my decisions can have far-reaching consequences that affect the well-being of individuals inside and outside my enterprise, today and in the future.

According to MacDonald (1996), in order for our planet to survive, large numbers of people must become wise. What if a large number of people who populated an organization practiced the commitments expressed by the Harvard MBA Oath? Joseph Jaworski, author of *Synchronicity* (1998), writes about a conversation he had in 1980 with quantum physicist David Bohm. Even though people retain their individuality, Bohm said, "it's actually a single intelligence that works with people who are moving in relationship with one another." He goes

The Heart of Leadership for Sustainable Change

on to say, “If you had a number of people who really pulled together and worked together in this way, it would be remarkable” (p. 81).

No doubt Aristotle, with his views on practical wisdom, would find the dilemmas of today’s world bewildering in both complexity and scope. He might be pleased to learn, however, that his template for applying virtues within idiosyncratic contexts endures as a prevailing vision for leaders who choose to play a bigger game.



THE GREATER GOOD IN ACTION

When it comes to sustainable change, every organization—whether a nonprofit seeking charitable donations, a government entity employing public funds, or a business selling a product or service—is concerned with money. No organization survives without operating funds. Each and every one of the enterprises featured in this book is sustainable in part because they make money, raise funds, and otherwise create value for their stakeholders and shareholders that keeps funds flowing in their direction. As Margaret Rode, founder and president of Web Sites for Good, puts it, “If the work you do is not profitable, you can’t sustain; you can’t live.” To Rode, a small-business owner who is determined to do work she loves, profitability is essential to encourage her own heart and to set an example for the naysayers out there who don’t believe that people can follow their dreams and earn a living at the same time.

Where has it ever been written that organizations and businesses can’t do well financially and do good in the world? For many people, doing good is the secret to doing well. In the fall 2010 *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Rosabeth Moss-Kanter writes, “In reality, any company is better off creating both bottom-line and societal benefits—and creating synergies between them” (p. 12). In her book on this topic, Moss-Kanter (2009) suggests that savvy and successful organizations find ways to add value through social responsibility initiatives that align with their mission.

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Examples of companies that do this terrifically include Kyle Zimmerman Photography, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Pan American Bank (located in both East Los Angeles and Santa Ana, California), which was founded by former U.S. treasurer Romana Acosta Bañuelos and is now led by Jesse Torres, president.

In 2008, when the scope and gravity of the failing global economy struck every community, families cut portrait photography from their personal budgets. Zimmerman found herself with a steep reduction in new and returning clients. Portrait photography had become an unaffordable luxury. Around the same time, Zimmerman made the decision to move her studio from a more commercial area of Albuquerque to an up-and-coming artistic area of town, where she set her sights on becoming a vibrant member of the creative community. The move to the artistic neighborhood is consistent with Zimmerman's personal and business mission, "to create fresh and enduring proof that all of our lives are art."

Thinking of her desire to bridge the community and art through her photography, and finding herself with more free time than she would prefer, Zimmerman networked with friends who put her in touch with several nonprofit agencies that could benefit from her passion and talent. On a pro-bono basis, she photographed the inner workings and impact of eleven nonprofit agencies and created beautiful displays for a community celebration. She also gave each agency royalty-free rights to use the photographs in their own donor development and marketing strategies.

Pan American Bank president Jesse Torres grew up in East Los Angeles, where he now works tirelessly to ensure the financial success of the bank while simultaneously providing opportunities for his customers and community. In fact, the mission of Pan American Bank is "to transform and empower Latino communities through banking relationships built on trust, service, respect, communication, and guidance." Whereas the national, big-name banks won't open local branches in Torres's community (one financial specialist from Merrill

The Heart of Leadership for Sustainable Change

Lynch asked Torres, “Why do you bother with poor, unprofitable customers?”), Pan American Bank, led by Torres, works every day to establish organizational initiatives that bolster the financial acuity of the individuals who live in the community.

One such initiative is the Financial Literacy Ambassador Program for elementary school students that Torres started with local KIPP Raíces Academy principal Amber Young. Torres told Elle that the Financial Literacy Ambassador Program is the logical answer to one of the bank’s goals: to “create a generation of asset builders who possess the knowledge to prevent another financial crisis.” Torres said, “If we want customers in twenty years, we have to start now with the kindergartners.”

Torres describes his community as remarkably unbanked and underbanked. In fact, about 40 percent of the mostly blue-collar residents of East Los Angeles do not have a savings or checking account. Because many adults in the community mistrust banks, the Financial Literacy Ambassador Program educates the children, who in turn show their parents that saving their money in the bank is less complex and more trustworthy than they have imagined. In addition to providing curriculum and instruction support for the young students at the KIPP Raíces Academy, Pan American Bank opens a bank account for each student, deposits the first five dollars, and waives all fees. Ever devoted to building the capacity of people in the community, the Financial Literacy Ambassador Program is led by “ambassadors”—the first students who went through the program, who can now mentor other students through the same process.

Both Zimmerman and Torres demonstrate generous support of their communities, but what makes them stand out as even more remarkable examples of leadership for sustainable change is that they gave that support during a recession. As many companies hunkered down, circled the wagons, and became less generous and less innovative, Zimmerman and Torres continued to ask themselves to play a bigger game. In doing so, they joined an elite group of forward thinkers who

understand that business performance and social responsibility are inextricably linked.

On the heels of a global financial crisis in which greed and concern only for personal comfort and profit on the part of some are to blame, many of today's consumers will tolerate nothing less than the partnerships illustrated in the leadership approaches of Zimmerman and Torres.



PASSION AND PURPOSE MEET OPPORTUNITY

In 2009, Elle attended the First World Congress on Positive Psychology in Philadelphia, where she had the opportunity to listen to Robert J. Vallerand, professor of psychology at the University of Quebec at Montreal, discuss passion as it relates to work. Vallerand distinguishes between two types of passion—harmonious passion and obsessive passion—each of which is associated with different outcomes and experiences.

Vallerand (2008) defines *passion* as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, find important, and in which they invest time and energy.” *Harmonious passion* originates autonomously within the individual and leads people to engage in activities that they love and that create “adaptive outcomes” such as improved psychological well-being, health, relationships, and performance. The motivation that drives harmonious passion is self-generated: no one holds a carrot on a stick in front of a person engaged in this way.

Obsessive passion, on the other hand, is a need to persist rigidly in an activity out of an ego-driven urge to gain the benefits it offers. Obsessive passion, according to Vallerand, often leads to stress and burnout and, ironically, less than optimal performance.

The greater good takes infinite forms, but it always starts with harmonious passion applied with purpose to make a difference. For Kyle Zimmerman, photographing the people and workings of the

The Heart of Leadership for Sustainable Change

nonprofit agencies in New Mexico is just one way she creates a greater good through her passion (photography) and through the purpose she is called to fulfill (showing people and communities how beautiful they are in their real lives—not the lives they think they are supposed to have). In fact, her work has produced several incarnations of the greater good—the nonprofit work of course, but also a program in which she taught photography to women living in a shelter for battered women who then went out and actually did some of the photography at the other nonprofit agencies. Another manifestation of the greater good for Zimmerman has been a collaborative project with a young woman diagnosed with breast cancer. Through this project, Zimmerman photographed the woman in her battle with cancer and created a book of photographs to document the experience through to her recovery.

Zimmerman is a master of adaptation when it comes to her work and life. She has a passion for photography and a clear sense of purpose about how her specific talent adds immeasurable value beyond quarterly business objectives. She notices where she can make a difference and she finds opportunity where others see only drudgery. In return, Zimmerman gets noticed by potential clients. Even though she initially had to lay off two of her photographers, her business has survived the worst recession in many years and in fact has diversified to meet the needs and opportunities she has seen in her community. The fact that Zimmerman remains true to her passion and purpose does not mean that she seeks to preserve the status quo—anything but, in fact. To remain true to her passion and purpose, Zimmerman constantly reinvents and renews her business in response to what she sees in the world around her. Mindfulness and adaptation are the keys to sustainable innovation.

At Pan American Bank, Torres also sees opportunities for creative application of the bank's mission that produce mutual and compounded benefits for everyone involved. On one of Elle's visits to the bank, for example, she met a local woman who was pitching

Renewal Coaching Fieldbook

to consultants from eastLAworks (a service of the nonprofit group Volunteers of East Los Angeles) a new product she had manufactured. A group of small-business advisers, eastLAworks provides tools and consulting to community entrepreneurs. Located in the Pan American Bank, where their office space is provided free of charge, these business experts shepherd community members who aspire to own their own businesses through the complexities of assessment, planning, and finance. The bank also provides free office space and support to a community computer lab where community members can take classes and use the Internet. Although eastLAworks and the other organizations housed by Pan American Bank operate independently from the bank, Torres sees their presence in the bank's building as essential to meeting his mission. He told Elle, "Our mission is to transform and empower our customers. We get behind groups who share that mission. It's through action that you show your mission is more than just words on paper. It's through action that you show you care."

The greater good is really the essential ingredient of sustainable change. And sustainable change—the ability to respond to needs through work we enjoy—makes all the difference. So we come full circle back to the idea that happy people doing meaningful work will change the world.

Individuals and teams may feel personally satisfied and may meet quarterly objectives and annual goals, but work that lacks a sense of meaning is just a job. Given the number of hours that most people give to their work over a lifetime, the greater good is not an indulgent luxury or just a by-product of those who have "do-gooder" impulses. The greater good is primary to the sustenance of humanity.

In the following nine chapters you will read the stories of leaders who have chosen to be happy and take on meaningful work for a greater good. If you're inspired by what you read and want to share your own story with us, please write to Elle at eallison@renewalcoaching.com. We would love to hear and learn from you.