

Transpersonal Leadership Series: *White Paper Three*

Sustainable Leadership; Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success

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LeaderShape
Shaping Transpersonal Leaders



TRANSPERSONAL LEADERSHIP

Routledge and LeaderShape Global in partnership are pleased to announce a series of quarterly White Papers around the subject of Transpersonal Leadership, culminating in the publication of a book entitled 'Leading Beyond the Ego: How to Become a Transpersonal Leader' in February 2018.

So what is Transpersonal Leadership? The concept was first published in a report on tomorrow's leadership, based on a leadership development journey developed by LeaderShape (Knights, 2011). The word "transpersonal" was inspired by the use of the word in "transpersonal psychology" (Bynum, 2010). "Transpersonal" is defined as "extending or going beyond the personal or individual, beyond the usual limits of ego and personality".

A Transpersonal Leader is defined as:

They operate beyond the ego while continuing personal development and learning. They are radical, ethical, and authentic while emotionally intelligent and caring.

They are able to:

- *embed authentic, ethical and emotionally intelligent behaviours into the DNA of the organisation*
- *build strong, collaborative relationships, and*
- *create a Performance Enhancing Culture that is Ethical, Caring and Sustainable*

LeaderShape Global is a UK headquartered organisation with a global culture that operates without borders. It exists to develop people around the world who can lead beyond their ego to be radical, ethical and authentic, ie. Transpersonal Leaders. It provides work-based learning through a faculty of senior executives who are accredited coaches and experienced facilitators, blended with online content and web based tools. www.leadershape.biz

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Sustainable Leadership; Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success

By Sue Coyne

This is our third White Paper, entitled “Sustainable Leadership; Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success” and written by Sue Coyne. This edgy and sometimes uncomfortable topic follows the first two very popular White Papers published in this series on the subject of “Ethical Leadership: How to Develop Ethical Leaders” which is a fundamental component of Transpersonal Leadership, and the very topical “Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century”.

In this third White Paper which is closely connected to the first two in its essence, we explore why we need a more sustainable approach to leadership and how we can shift from the old mechanistic view of leadership to a more sustainably effective one that is appropriate for the 21st century. It helps leaders become more relevant and less obsolete and lead in a way that sustains rather than drains themselves and others.

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Sue is the author of “Stop Doing Start Leading: How to Shift from Doing the Work Yourself to Becoming a Great Leader” (Coyne, 2016). She is a contributor to “Leadership Team Coaching in Practice: Developing High-performing Teams” by Peter Hawkins (Hawkins, 2014) and “Enabling Genius” (Downey, 2016) by Myles Downey.

Introduction:

“100 years later we are back where we were, a new world struggling with an old structure that is no longer fit for purpose. If businesses want to be successful they need to be authentic, genuine and real”.

This is a quote from Sir Bob Geldof who was keynote speaker at a conference on trust that I attended in London in October 2014. I was struck by this pattern of getting stuck in an old view of the world that is no longer appropriate and finding it difficult to shift as I had personally experienced this in my own life. Maybe you have too.

Sir Bob explained that in the 19th century it took two world wars to shift our perspective to one appropriate for the 20th century. We are now 16 years into the 21st century yet many of our institutions including our organisations and their leaders are stuck in a 20th century mind-set. What is it going to take for us to shift to a perspective appropriate to the 21st century? What does this mean for the shift we need to make as leaders?

What is sustainable leadership?

When you search for sustainable leadership on Google there is a lot of information about *environmental* sustainability. When we refer to sustainable leadership in this White Paper we are looking at it from the *people* perspective. It is leadership that delivers sustainable high performance through creating the conditions in which everyone thrives, thereby ensuring that the organisation and all of its stakeholders experience sustainable success. As such, it is an integral part of Transpersonal Leadership.

Why do we need Sustainable Leadership?

Perhaps you are a leader in an organisation. Maybe you are a leader outside of work. But there is no maybe about whether you are the leader of your own life.

How many of us pay attention to how sustainable our approach to leading our life is? Very often it takes a wakeup call to bring the message home. Having had cancer and burnout myself in 2000 followed shortly afterwards by divorce I have personally experienced the impact these sort of wake up calls have on your life.

Following the sale of the business I was a director and shareholder of in 2002 I retrained as a coach so that I could support other leaders in finding a way to be successful without having the sort of wakeup call I had. So that's why sustainable leadership matters to me personally.

Let's examine why sustainable leadership matters from the bigger picture perspective.

The 20th century view of the world sees organisations as machines and people as cogs inside them.



This mechanistic mind-set is based on the notion that profit is king and the purpose of businesses is to maximise profit for the owners/shareholders. This way of thinking dates from Adam Smith and other 19th century economists who ushered in the Industrial Revolution. It produces hierarchical

organisations where super hero leaders use IQ, authority and a command and control style to get the cogs in the machine to do what they deem to be necessary for maximising profit.

This approach has enabled an unprecedented period of growth and innovation but it is reaching the limit of its effectiveness due to:

- Globalization
- The ever increasing pace of change
- The impact of technology
- Widespread use of social media giving customers and other stakeholders more influence
- The changing needs of employees with Generations X (born between ca. 1960 and 1980) and Y or Millennials (born between 1980 and 1993) expecting engagement and fulfilment at work (IBM, 2015).

What are the costs of maintaining this mechanistic viewpoint beyond its useful life?

Erosion of trust in businesses and their leaders

As a result of numerous scandals and crises including the financial crisis in the West created by the bankers in 2008 and Volkswagen falsifying emission tests in 2015, trust in business leaders is at a low ebb (Knights, 2015). According to the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman, 2015) trust levels in business among the general public decreased in 16 out of 27 countries with the level of trust in business falling below 50% in the majority of them.

Could it be that the relentless focus on delivering short-term financial results and keeping their shareholders happy, causes business leaders to do whatever it takes to meet their objectives?

Sustainable leadership is about starting to reverse these low levels of trust.

Adverse effects on health and well-being

The transition from the 20th century paradigm where people believed that you could not succeed without burning out has already started. It is, however, shocking to read the results of research studies that show that there is still a long way to go. In 2015 almost three quarters (73%) of respondents to Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey were suffering from at least one dimension of work-related stress (Stress.org, 2016). The survey signals that time pressure is the most common stress factor with more than a third (36%) saying they worked in excess of 40 hours per week.

What are the financial costs of negative stress in the workplace?

The cost of workplace stress is estimated to cost US businesses \$300 billion and the cost of work related stress to the UK economy reached a massive £6.5bn in 2012 (Shearer, 2013). This figure was arrived at by taking the 10.4 million days lost to stress and multiplying it by the average cost of a 'sick' day, which is £618.

Stress is a massive opportunity cost for any business. If employees were not sick or underperforming due to stress how much value could they be adding to the organisation?

I believe that leaders who create environments in which they and their people risk burn out will not only be unfit to lead they will become obsolete and irrelevant.

Organizational brain drain

Then there is an additional cost of stress that neuroscience has brought to light. The impact of on-going stress on the capacity of an individual's brain means that stress is reducing the collective brainpower of organisations. If you hire someone and put him or her under high pressure without the tools to handle the resultant stress the likelihood is that he or she will lose brain capacity as a result (Goeway, 2014).

Due to the impact of stress on collective brainpower more organisations are working with experts on neuroplasticity to address this issue. Neuroplasticity and the ability to rewire your brain to access its optimal state will soon become the new competitive edge in organizations (Goeway, 2014).

The fact remains that many organisations are not doing anything about workplace stress. In 2016 there is no excuse for this. The benefits at an individual as well as organizational level are exponential. It is up to sustainable leaders to start to address this issue.

Take a moment to reflect and ask yourself:

Why does sustainable leadership matter to me?

What is the shift required for sustainable leadership?

“The most exciting breakthroughs of the twenty-first century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human.”

- John Naisbitt, American author and public speaker in the area of futures studies

If we are to shift to a more sustainable view of leadership a re-wiring of our collective brain is required.

How do we do this?

Our working memory has limited capacity. So, in order to cope with the huge amount of information the brain has to deal with, it identifies what is significant or occurs frequently and then “hardwires” it into our long-term memory, which has more capacity (McLoed, 2009).

So, what happens is your brain filters the information coming in to find things which confirm your already hardwired beliefs. These beliefs become your thoughts, which influence how you feel, what you do and the outcomes you get as a result. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is not easy to break out of.

The reason it is difficult is that your brain likes certainty and does not like change. What this means is that in a world that is constantly and rapidly changing your view of the world very quickly becomes outdated and holds you back or keeps you stuck.

So the first step in re-wiring our collective brain is to identify the beliefs that have been hard wired into our psyche since the 19th century that are keeping us stuck in the outdated mechanistic view of the world. Beliefs such as:

- Organisations are machines
- People are dispensable cogs in those machines
- People can't be trusted and must be told what to do and controlled
- Profit is king
- Success requires burnout etc.

We then need to hard wire a set of new beliefs based on a more sustainable, human approach to leadership. Beliefs such as:

- Organizations and the people in them are living systems and do not operate in isolation
- Organisations have multiple stakeholders all of whom need to benefit from its activities etc.

70% of what happens in organizations comes from people imitating the leaders (Marlier & Parker, 2009). So if we are to see a shift to this human, more sustainable approach to leadership it starts with leaders themselves changing. Again this comes down to re-wiring outdated beliefs at an individual level.

Most of the beliefs that form the basis of our way of thinking and behaving are hard wired into our subconscious mind by the time we are seven years old. As we are not taught about the need to update this wiring as we go through life (like updating the software on our laptop) most of us have a seven year old running our lives as adults (Rock & Page, 2009).

Learning to let go of the beliefs that hold you back is an important leadership skill. Examples of such limiting beliefs are:

- I need to be perfect to be a good leader
- I need to know everything to be a good leader
- I need to be right
- I need to work hard to prove I am good enough
- If I make a mistake or admit I don't know others will think I can't do my job
- I have to fix everything

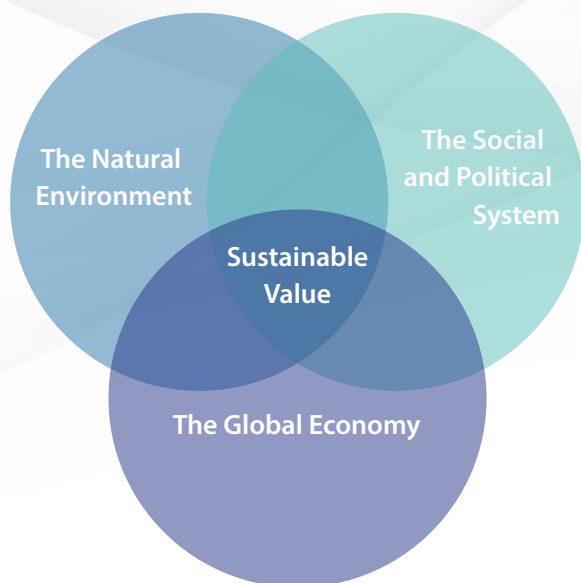
It can be really stressful for leaders to feel they have to know and control everything. When leaders behave in this way people feel mistrusted and resentful. The negative impact it has on others makes it totally unsustainable in the longer term.

Leaders changing their beliefs will enable their behaviours to change with appropriate development support and ultimately we will see a collective paradigm shift.

What else needs to change in order to make this shift sustainable?

You will have heard the saying that what gets measured gets done. So we need to shift from over focusing on financial measures of success to a broader definition of success. This broader definition needs to recognise that organisations depend for their success on a complex global system made up of the natural environment, the social and political system and the global economy. This is referred to as the Triple Context (Tomorrow's Company, 2011)).

The Triple Context



The definition of organisational success that takes this into account is the Triple Bottom Line. This was developed by John Elkington in 1994 (Elkington, 1997) and is a balanced score card which reports on the three Ps: profit, people and planet.

For organizations to be able to perform consistently well across the balanced score card of the Triple Bottom Line they need leaders who can bring balance into their own lives.

Triple Bottom Line



Leaders are no different to most other people. There are three things they want in their life: happiness, health and success. This realisation led me to create "Triple H Leadership" to support leaders in adopting a wider definition of success that allows them to be happy, healthy and therefore sustainably high performing.

Triple "H" Leadership

The Three H's of High Performance, Health and Happiness

Being a High Performing Leader

There are three aspects to being a sustainable high performer: Purpose, Prioritising and Pausing.

Purpose

Identifying your purpose as a leader and the difference you want to make through your leadership gives you a strong "why". It enables you to be confident and authentic as a leader. This in turn means that people trust in you to do the right thing.

Prioritising

Once you are clear on your purpose that acts as a filter for how you spend your time.

You need to identify your absolute priorities that will enable you to deliver on your purpose and make sure you focus on them each day. As you do this the positive impact you are having increases. Your work/life balance will improve significantly too.

Prioritising is also about using the learning from neuroscience to work in a brain friendly way:

- Schedule tasks requiring the most attention and energy when you have a fresh and alert mind
- Doing multiple tasks results in a big drop in accuracy or performance. So focus whenever possible on one thing at a time (Rock, 2009).
- Every time you allow yourself to be distracted by a call or e-mail it takes more effort to focus and you have lower energy reserves to draw on. A study done at London University found

that constant e-mail and text-messaging reduces mental capacity by an average of 10 points on an IQ test. The effect is similar to missing a night's sleep (Rock, 2009).

Pausing

Due to the mechanistic view in many organisations we are expected to perform at a high level 90 percent of the time. If we compare this to athletes we see that they are only expected to perform at their best for 10 percent of the time. The rest of the time they are in training or recovery. If you are to avoid stress and burnout and be a sustainable leader you need to build recovery breaks into your working day and make sure you get enough sleep (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003).

Being a Healthy Leader

Operating to a wider definition of sustainable success based on the three H's requires further re-wiring of your brain (more about how to do this later). The belief that we have had, and that many still have currently, is that it is ok to work long hours or to do whatever it takes to deliver on short-term financial objectives. We have seen the evidence already in this paper, which shows that this leads to stress and ultimately burnout.

So what keeps us stuck in this mind-set?

Many of us have been brought up to believe that it's not ok to be selfish and put ourselves first. I have worked with clients who when asked to draw a picture of their own lives realised that they didn't even feature in them. This not only saddened them but also made them realise that they needed to change the limiting beliefs that created this situation.

The new belief that many of them have chosen to support themselves in becoming sustainable leaders is:

"I am the instrument through which I make my difference as a leader. It is therefore part of my job as a leader to look after that instrument before doing anything else. Only then will I be able to make a difference to the lives of others."

What benefits does being healthy bring?

Isn't it true that when you are fit and healthy you handle stress better, you have more energy and you feel a greater sense of well-being?

According to research from the Centre for Creative Leadership, executives who are physically fit are considered to be more effective leaders than those who aren't. So, there is now evidence to link looking after your health with more sustainable high performance at work and enhanced leadership competence (Center for Creative Leadership, 2016).

When I refer to health for leaders I regard it as having three key aspects:

- Brain health
- Stress management
- Healthy beliefs

Brain health – your competitive advantage

Science used to think that our brain was fixed once we became an adult and that it degraded with age. In the past decade, however, neuroscientists have discovered that our brain has neuroplasticity. This means that our brain has a life-long capacity to change and rewire itself

meaning that we can continually learn throughout life (Pascual-Leone et al, 2013). So, brain health is about retaining the neuroplasticity of your brain.

As a leader, maintaining the neuroplasticity of your brain is part of your job.

How do you do this? Through continually learning things that you don't already know how to do; through regular exercise which gets more oxygen to the brain; through eating plenty of green vegetables and good oils; and through getting 7 to 9 hours sleep a night.

Stress – don't let it get you down

Another key aspect of the health and wellbeing of a leader is being able to handle stress.

Our brain is wired to sense danger and then put us into a state of fight/flight/freeze to help us to survive the danger. Because we need all the energy to run or fight our brain shuts down our pre-frontal cortex which is the executive centre where we have our short term memory and do all of our best thinking and planning (Rock & Page, 2009). This completely disables us from operating effectively as leaders.

Also, stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are released into our system. This is alright in short bursts but as many leaders are operating in a stressful state for extended periods the on-going presence of these hormones in the body can cause health problems.

In order to enhance our ability to cope with stress we need to change our attitude.

Mindfulness can help with this; it slows us down, helps us remain calm and be more present in the moment (Siegel, 2016). For many, exercise is another effective way to reduce stress.

Your beliefs can keep you healthy

We have already said that our hardwired beliefs become outdated and hold us back.

So, how do you update these hardwired, limiting beliefs?

The first step is to bring these limiting beliefs to conscious awareness. As they have been in place for so long they are buried deep in the subconscious and it takes patience and skill to bring them to the surface.

Once you have identified your limiting beliefs you can start to identify what would be a more empowering set of new beliefs given the outcomes you want to bring about.

Neuroscience has shown us that you can't just overwrite these existing beliefs, which are hardwired into neural pathways in your subconscious brain. The only way is to create new neural pathways for the new beliefs that you identify.

In order to hardwire a new belief we need to focus on it enough over time that it becomes embedded in our subconscious.

Learning to more consciously choose your thoughts and behaviour is important as a sustainable leader as you have an impact on those around you.

Being a Happy Leader

Again much of what we need to do to be a happy leader involves looking at our beliefs and re-wiring them where necessary.

Is happiness something we find externally?

Many people have a tendency to believe that when we lose weight, earn more money or have the car/house/partner we are dreaming of we will be happy. Often when you get whatever *it* is, the happiness is short lived.

This is illustrated by the fact that personal incomes more than doubled between 1960 and the late 1990s but the proportion of people who described themselves as happy remained stable at 30 percent. It seems that once you are above the poverty line more money contributes less and less to your happiness (Stein & Book, 2011).

Many people think that if they work harder they will be more successful and they'll be happier. Have you ever been so busy striving to achieve a goal that you got addicted to the destination and forgot to enjoy the journey? Happiness often gets indefinitely postponed as the minute you achieve something you start trying to achieve the next thing.

Happiness is not about what is happening in the external world – only 10 percent of our long-term happiness is external. 90 percent is how we process that external world (Achor, 2016).

So, if striving for external things and achieving our goals does not give us lasting happiness, what does?

Can it come from serving others?

Happiness research confirms that true happiness makes us naturally want to serve others. It motivates us to be generous and to use our success to support other people's success (Anik et al, 2009).

Is happiness something innate?

The Ancient Greeks defined happiness as the *joy* of moving towards our potential (Achor, 2010). This creates a very different picture of the connection between happiness and success. This inner joy enhances your performance at work, attracts positive relationships, generates a feeling of satisfaction with life and helps you to be healthier and live longer. Yes, there has actually been research that has proven that happier people live 14 percent longer than miserable people, increasing longevity by 7.5 to 10 years (Hamilton, 2016). How can you create inner happiness?

There are two happiness chemicals in the brain – dopamine and oxytocin. Many studies suggest that as we age we are constantly losing our stores of dopamine. The two best ways to increase your brain's dopamine production are smiling and exercise. Ways to increase levels of oxytocin include hugging people, stroking pets, having a massage, watching romantic films, dancing, meditating and making music, particularly in the company of others.

Does *your* brain have the chemistry of happiness?

A study done by Richard Davidson, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, showed that when Buddhist Monks experienced bliss when deep in meditation, the left prefrontal lobe of their brain (above the left eyebrow) showed increased electrical activity. The findings in this study suggested that bliss or happiness is not just a vague feeling, but also a physical state of the brain (Time, 2005).

More importantly, this physical state can be induced deliberately. He refers to this as making a left shift. Many of the activities we have already discussed including exercise, meditation and mindfulness help to make a left shift.

How does happiness affect sustainable organisational success?

The evidence shows that companies with higher than average employee happiness have better financial performance and customer satisfaction (Achor, 2016). As a leader it is your job to contribute to the happiness of your people. This starts with you developing a happiness mind-set. What makes a happy mind-set is the belief that creating happiness for yourself is not self-indulgent but a necessity as it is a performance enhancer, for you and those around you. If you choose happiness in the moment everything we can test for improves – intelligence, creativity and productivity (Warr & Clapperton, 2010).

Sustainable Leadership skills that enable your people to thrive over the long term

“Triple H” provides the foundations of sustainable leadership by enabling you to understand your why and how to deliver sustainable high performance in yourself.

You then become a role model and create a ripple effect that influences the behaviour of those around you thus creating the climate and ultimately the culture of the organization. Your job is to ensure that this climate enables your people to thrive and deliver sustainable success.

The leadership capabilities that enable you to create this climate for sustainable success are:

- Building trust and rapport
- Understanding what is ethical and the bigger picture so that you can do the right thing for the team/organisation
- Developing your emotional intelligence
- Developing your awareness beyond emotional intelligence, so that you are present and centred in the moment, can sense what is needed in any situation and adjust your leadership style accordingly
- Empowering and developing people through coaching, feedback, utilising diversity and individual and team accountability
- Engaging all of your key stakeholders to create mutual sustainable success
- Developing your Influencing, storytelling and collaboration skills.
- Learning how to lead change in yourself and others through self-directed neuroplasticity

In short, you need to become a Transpersonal Leader.

Ultimately this paper is about your ability to change and lead change in order to bring about the shift to sustainable leadership. As a sustainable leader you need to know how to re-wire your brain so that you can be the change you want to see. You also need to enable others to do the same through creating an environment in which they feel safe and valued and as a result are willing to learn, grow, experiment and try out new ways of doing things/behaviours. Finally you help to embed the change by focusing your people repeatedly on the behaviours you want to see.

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